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TITLE OF THESIS/*TITRE DE LA THÈSE* "Moral Discovery": Conrad's Artistic Method

UNIVERSITY/*UNIVERSITÉ* University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta

DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS PRESENTED/ *GRADE POUR LEQUEL CETTE THÈSE FUT PRÉSENTÉE* Ph. D.

YEAR THIS DEGREE CONFERRED/*ANNÉE D'OBTENTION DE CE GRADE* 1978

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

"MORAL DISCOVERY": CONRAD'S ARTISTIC METHOD

by

(C) GARY DONALD GARRISON

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT..... ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1978

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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Abstract

Works in the mainstream of modern literature tend to glorify the reveries and sensations of the individual mind and have for their heroes the authors themselves, who alone are capable of exercising mastery over the experiences they relate; this they do by organizing their material into aesthetic patterns. Conrad, however, is not in this mainstream. His best works are distinguished by his philosophical method: his writing of fiction is his means of pursuing truth.

Conrad demonstrates his mastery of the experiences he relates by exercising his judgment and showing what those experiences mean, and his most successful works show that human excellence is achieved by exercising one's judgment and thereby developing a finely discriminating conscience to guide one to act in the best way possible. He shows also that excellence does not result from a lonely struggle with one's conscience, but can only be achieved through actively collaborating with other men to maintain the moral standards of civilization that make excellence possible.

When the old teacher of languages struggles with the raw materials of Razumov's story to make "the moral discovery which should be the object of every tale," he is striving to judge what that story might mean. Conrad's dramatization of that struggle in Under Western Eyes is typical Conrad, for it shows that Conrad's interest is not in portraying experience for its own sake, but in discovering the meaning of experience. In Lord Jim and Chance, Conrad's narrative technique affords similar opportunities, but there he fails to utilize his

method's fullest potential and is bogged down in sentimentalities. Heart of Darkness, however, although it contains considerable sentimentality, shows Conrad's art in at least partial triumph. Conrad's concern for the maintenance of civilization through the use of language and the exercise of judgment is realized here in his dramatization of Marlow's struggling to make sense of a horrifying and absurd experience.

Heart of Darkness, Victory, Typhoon, The Shadow-Line, The Secret Agent, and Nostromo are Conrad's greatest achievements, for they all show Conrad engaged seriously in a profound, disinterested pursuit of truth. Each of these tales deals with the question, "What is the best way for man to live?", and although some of them are flawed by the author's occasional failure to express judgments that are justified by the experiences he presents, they all contribute in a significant way to the maintenance of civilization.

"The Secret Sharer," though often cited as a major success, is founded on an authorial error in judgment: Conrad does not show Leggatt's killing the man to have been justified, nor does he justify the narrator's shielding Leggatt from the law. Critical consideration of this tale, however, shows by comparison how much greater than it Conrad's successes are and how much more effectively they deal with threats to morality and to civilization. Although these threats are numerous, one that occupies Conrad throughout these works is the lack of self-control, particularly the control of one's imagination.

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I

The Philosophical Novelist

Conrad proclaims, in "The Preface" to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', that, as a novelist, "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see."[1] Critics have often cited this statement to justify their own appetite for imagery and their placing of Conrad the novelist in the company of those moderns for whom the transcription of sensory impressions is the proper substance of literary art. Such placing, however, does not allow the recognition of Conrad's most important distinction: his acute moral sensibility.

Virginia Woolf's essay "Modern Fiction" concisely expresses the direction literature was moving in the early decades of the twentieth century. "Examine for a moment," she says, "an ordinary mind on an ordinary day."

> The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper

> stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it.[2]

It could be successfully argued that an ordinary mind cannot be the subject of a great novel. The mind Mrs. Woolf characterizes in this paragraph, however, is not merely an ordinary mind, but an essentially passive one. This mind spends its day receiving impressions, and those impressions shape themselves into what Mrs. Woolf calls life: the impressions themselves determine where the accent falls and what is of importance. Her account of life shows that the spirit she believes it is the novelist's task to convey dwells in the visible, audible, tactile world from which impressions come, not in the human mind itself. Furthermore, her own practice, like that of Joyce and others, shows it is endemic to the stream-of-consciousness novel that life must be conveyed as capable of being sensed, but incapable of being known or understood. "Is it not the task of the novelist," she proclaims, "to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit . . . with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible?" Clearly, as her own fiction confirms, she intends the novelist to convey this spirit as essentially unknowable and uncircumscribable; a novelist who does otherwise is guilty of burdening the novel with material "alien and external" to life.

Her conception of life was formulated as a means of coping, in a world stunned by a war the utter brutality of which had previously been unimaginable, with pressing problems that seemed insoluble, and it is a conception she shared with many of the best-educated and most articulate of her time. In the final chapter of Mimesis, Erich Auerbach

studies a passage from To the Lighthouse and shows that the method Mrs. Woolf uses to portray reality in her fiction is the method a great number of those now considered to be the best modern novelists conceived as a means of coping with the dizzying rapidity of social and political change and with the shocking clash of national differences that ushered in and was accelerated by two successive world wars. Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Thomas Mann, and Andre' Gide, says Auerbach, all employ this one basic method to represent reality in their fiction. "What takes place here in Virginia Woolf's novel," Auerbach concludes, referring to the fifth section of part one of To the Lighthouse,

> is precisely what was attempted everywhere in works of this kind . . . to put the emphasis on the random occurrence, to exploit it not in the service of a planned continuity of action but in itself. And in the process something new and elemental appeared: nothing less than the wealth of reality and depth of life in every moment to which we surrender ourselves without prejudice. To be sure, what happens in that moment--be it outer or inner processes--concerns in a very personal way the individuals who live in it, but it also (and for that very reason) concerns the elementary things which men in general have in common. It is precisely the random moment which is comparatively independent of the controversial and unstable orders over which men fight and despair; it passes unaffected by them, as daily life. The more it is exploited, the more the elementary things which our lives have in common come to light. The more numerous, varied, and simple the people are who appear as subjects of such random moments, the more effectively must what they have in common shine forth.[3]

Auerbach claims that "an economic and cultural levelling process is taking place" as a result of considering life in this way and suggests that "It is still a long way to a common life of mankind on earth, but the goal begins to be visible." He also recognizes that there are "dangers and catastrophes"[4] inherent in the propagation of writing such as this, but he does not acknowledge that the aesthetic theory underlying this method of representing reality can

support its goal of the universal common life only by denying the necessity of judgment.

Auerbach calls the movement toward a common life of mankind on earth an approach of "unification and simplification,"[5] but it is far more ominous than can be inferred from these two innocuous terms: it portends nothing less than the realizing on earth of the universal and homogeneous state. Leo Strauss, perhaps the most intelligent political thinker of this century, argues cogently against the ideal of the universal and homogeneous state: not only would it order human existence so as to render work, disagreement, and unhappiness obsolete, but it would likewise deny the possibility of human excellence.[6] The end result of the levelling process fostered by these modern novelists would be the death of philosophy and, ultimately, the loss of the opportunity to think critically and converse intelligently about that in which human excellence consists.

Conrad, of course, wrote most of his greatest novels before the First World War, before the spectre of rapid and continuous universal conflict and change was stunningly incarnated on the battlefields of Europe. But even though his was primarily a pre-war consciousness, his fiction displays a profound and serious understanding of human nature and of the conditions that made World War I inevitable. The great writing that demonstrates how Conrad's mind works has not been rendered irrelevant by the two World Wars any more than Shakespeare has been rendered irrelevant by his living before the technological age. On the contrary, the failure of post-war writers generally to cope intelligently with the post-war world and the inability of critics to recognize the work of those writers as a failure makes it imperative that Conrad's distinction be reexamined and reemphasized.

Unlike Joyce, Mrs. Woolf, Proust, Mann, or Gide, Conrad was committed to the maintenance of civilization: through his works shines forth a man whose primary concerns were the discovery of the meaning of human experience and the exploration of the ways in which man might achieve excellence. When he says his task is to make his reader hear, feel, and see, he means not only that he must include aural, tactile, and visual images in his artistic representation of life, but also that he intends to present his understanding of that life. His heavy emphasis on "see" is much more than an indication of a preference for the visual; it is a reminder that in English the verb to see means also to understand.

Conrad is not an imagist or a symbolist or an impressionist and could not propose a technical programme of development for the novel that would provide direction for the kind of novels he had to write. His most concerted attempt to justify his writing is the "Preface" to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', which is, as even his most dedicated admirers admit, an unrigorous piece of writing. Nevertheless, Conrad does provide in it some clear indications of what he thought was his purpose as a novelist. Besides providing fodder for the imagemongers, the "Preface" explains why it is Conrad knew he could not subscribe to any of the various theories of artistic practice—what he calls "the temporary formulas of his craft."

> The enduring part of them—the truth which each only imperfectly veils—should abide with him as the most precious of his possessions, but they all: Realism, Romanticism, Naturalism, even the unofficial sentimentalism . . . all these gods must, after a short period of fellowship, abandon him—even on the very threshold of the temple—to the stammerings of his conscience and to the outspoken consciousness of the difficulties of his work. (x-xi)

Unlike the modern novelists who strive for verisimilitude in their

writing, Conrad aims for truth itself. His assertion that the artist's conscience is the basis of his method unequivocally sets him apart from the conception and the practice of art of those generally considered to be in the mainstream of modern literature. His greatest works show not only the fineness of his moral sensibility but justify Leavis's placing him in the great tradition of the English novel as one of those novelists whose most significant distinction is their profound and serious interest in moral questions. Conrad bears comparison with D. H. Lawrence not because he was a contemporary but because Lawrence, likewise a novelist not in the mainstream of modern literature, shared with Conrad a vital interest in the maintenance of a civilization that values human excellence.

In his essay on Nostromo, Robert Penn Warren shows he recognizes the nature and significance of Conrad's distinction when he refers to Conrad's method as "philosophical." "The philosophical novelist," says Warren,

> is one for whom the documentation of the world is constantly striving to rise to the level of generalization about values, for whom the image strives to rise to symbol, for whom images always fall into a dialectical configuration, for whom the urgency of experience, no matter how vividly and strongly experience may enchant, is the urgency to know the meaning of experience. This is not to say that the philosophical novelist is schematic and deductive. It is to say quite the contrary, that he is willing to go naked into the pit, again and again, to make the same old struggle for his truth.[7]

Warren uses the term philosophical precisely, to place Conrad's work in the tradition of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, whose primary object was the pursuit of truth and who relied on dialectic as the best method for that pursuit. Conrad's fiction, however, is not as obviously dialectical as are Plato's dialogues. Conrad's dialectical

method does not consist in portraying several speakers engaged in sustained rational argument; rather Conrad struggles to judge human experience and shows his judgment to be true by presenting the experience itself. What makes Conrad a great and a philosophical novelist is his telling of tales that demonstrate his capacity for using the art of fiction to judge human experience--his talent to make real in the immediate concrete particularities of his fiction the truth that his conscience perceives through the observation of life.

Not only does Conrad himself continue to "make the same old struggle for his truth" in each successive work of fiction, but he often employs characters as narrators and dramatizes a similar struggle in them. Heart of Darkness and Under Western Eyes are works of this type, where a substantial portion of the author's creative energy is directed toward portraying the narrator's struggle to seek and articulate the meaning of his experience as he tells his tale. An interesting fact about Conrad's habit of subtitling his novels is his insistence in calling most of them "tales": Nostromo he subtitles "A Tale of the Seaboard," The Secret Agent "A Simple Tale," Victory "An Island Tale," and Lord Jim "A Tale." He thereby indicates he is keenly interested not only in the stories, but in their being told and judged by someone. In some of his tales, Conrad's interest in judgment may not be obvious, but in his successful works that interest is always serious and pervasive.

Perhaps Conrad's most effective statement of his purpose and method occurs not in his discursive prose, but in the dramatic context of Under Western Eyes. It comes from the old teacher of languages, a narrator more self-conscious and more uncertain of his

capacity to tell his tale than most of Conrad's narrators.[8] Having just shown Razumov sleeping fitfully after his arranging for Haldin's arrest, the old teacher of languages digresses:

> Approaching this part of Mr. Razumov's story, my mind, the decent mind of an old teacher of languages, feels more and more the difficulty of the task.
>
> The task is not in truth the writing in the narrative form a précis of a strange human document, but the rendering—I perceive it now clearly—of the moral conditions ruling over a large portion of this earth's surface; conditions not easily to be understood, much less discovered in the limits of a story, till some key-word is found; a word that could stand at the back of all the words covering the pages, a word which, if not truth itself, may perchance hold truth enough to help the moral discovery which should be the object of every tale.
>
> I turn over for the hundredth time the leaves of Mr. Razumov's record, I lay it aside, I take up the pen—and the pen being ready for its office of setting down black on white I hesitate. For the word that persists in creeping under its point is no other word than 'cynicism.' (66-67)

David Lodge, in his Language of Fiction, cites this passage as support for his argument that in many works of fiction there are one or two frequently repeated words that hold the key to that work's pattern. He claims, for instance, that Jane Eyre can be understood more fully when one realizes how the novel is patterned through its use of the contrasting images of fire and air ("eyre"). Lodge's approach has its advantages, but to contend that it finds support in the above passage constitutes a refusal, or reveals an incapacity, to understand what Conrad is saying here. "Cynicism" means little unless one realizes it is a term the narrator uses in Under Western Eyes to characterize the actions and actors presented in the tale; conversely, those actions and actors would be mere shadows without the narrator's and the author's deliberate judgment on them. Lodge's method for dealing with works of fiction, however, is designed to illuminate word and image patterns and not to elucidate judgments

or the process of judging, and he demonstrates this decisively in the commentary he presents relative to the digression of the old teacher of languages:

> The key-words of Joseph Conrad's novels and stories, for instance--darkness in Heart of Darkness, youth in Youth, silver and material interests in Nostromo, for example--are kept reverberating in our ears by conscious contrivance. Conrad has in fact given us a clue to his method through the fictitious narrator of Under Western Eyes . . . .

Here Lodge cites the middle paragraph of the passage quoted above, to which he appends this footnote:

> In Under Western Eyes the key-word is cynicism--a somewhat surprising one which no doubt explains why Conrad calls attention to it so explicitly.[9]

If a key-word is "kept reverberating in our ears by conscious contrivance," how would it be possible for Conrad to surprise his reader by revealing that key-word in Under Western Eyes? Lodge does not explain his own surprise upon discovering "cynicism" to be the key-word, but since his subject is "Repetition"--the subheading of the section where his comments appear--his surprise is probably due to the relatively few occurrences of that word in the tale. Also, cynicism is a rather complex, abstract concept--in quite a different league from "youth," "darkness,""silver," and "material interests"--a concept not easily linked to images or other words through which it can "reverberate." Instead of supporting Lodge's argument, the narrator's digression appears rather to cast serious doubt on its validity, especially insofar as it concerns key-words and patterns in Under Western Eyes.

Cynicism is a difficult concept that must be embodied in human form to be understood accurately and to be presented forcefully. Under Western Eyes is one such embodiment, and this digression of

the narrator's demonstrates not only how this novel works, but sheds considerable light on Conrad's artistic method in general. As he ponders Razumov's journal, the old teacher of languages struggles to make a "moral discovery" that will justify his tale to his reader and to himself. When he finally settles on "cynicism" as the word he needs to characterize Razumov's story, he continues with a general summary of what he has presented so far, quickened by the moral discovery he has just articulated. He says:

> For [cynicism] is the mark of Russian autocracy and of Russian revolt. In its pride of numbers, in its strange pretensions of sanctity, and in the secret readiness to abase itself in suffering, the spirit of Russia is the spirit of cynicism. It informs the declarations of statesmen, the theories of her revolutionists, and the mystic vaticinations of prophets to the point of making freedom look like a form of debauch, and the Christian virtues themselves appear actually indecent. . . . But I must apologize for the digression. It proceeds from the consideration of the course taken by the story of Mr. Razumov after his conservative convictions, diluted in a vague liberalism natural to the ardour of his age, had become crystallized by the shock of his contact with Haldin.(67)

The preceding portion of the tale has dramatized the conflict in Razumov between his yearning to achieve personal academic distinction and his loyalty to his country, but the autocratic ruthlessness of the "hate-inspiring" Mr. de P—— and the blatant disregard for life demonstrated by Haldin, his assassin, provide the cynical backdrop for Razumov's inner conflict. The cynicism demonstrated by the revolutionists and autocrats alike ensnares Razumov and eventually destroys all he had to live for except the very Russia which gives rise to that cynicism.

Conrad notes in his prefatory remarks that this tale is "an attempt to render not so much the political state as the psychology of Russia"(vii), and he accomplishes this by creating Razumov, a mere citizen of Russia with no other allegiances, familial or

otherwise, who, like Conrad himself, strongly adheres to distinctly conservative political principles.[10] Although Razumov himself is no cynic, the web of cynicism in which he is caught radically disrupts his life. The psychology of Razumov's entrapment receives perhaps its most memorable and effective presentation in his interview with Councillor Mikulin that ends part one of the novel. Mikulin has summoned Razumov to notify him of Haldin's execution and, as he says, to allow himself and Razumov the opportunity to become "personally acquainted"(98). Razumov understands, however, that Mikulin set up the interview because he wants "in some way to shake my moral balance"(97). Razumov openly declares:

> "I happen to have been born a Russian with patriotic instincts—whether inherited or not I am not in a position to say. . . . Yes, patriotic instincts developed by a faculty of independent thinking—of detached thinking. In that respect I am more free than any social democratic revolution could make me. . . ."(98)

The irony is that a sincere patriotic act robs him of that very freedom, a fact that only becomes apparent in the closing moments of his visit with Mikulin:

> "But, really, I must claim the right to be done once for all with that man [Haldin]. And in order to accomplish this I shall take the liberty . . ."
> Razumov on his side of the table bowed slightly to the seated bureaucrat.
> " . . . To retire—simply to retire," he finished with great resolution.
> He walked to the door, thinking, "Now he must show his hand. He must ring and have me arrested before I am out of the building, or he must let me go. And either way . . ."
> An unhurried voice said—
> "Kirylo Sidorovitch."
> Razumov at the door turned his head.
> "To retire," he repeated.
> "Where to?" asked Councillor Mikulin softly.(99)

The Russian autocracy has the power to arrest and execute its enemies at will, but it has a much more devious means of forcing its allies

to its defense. The implied threat of arrest that has worried Razumov all along is now used to pressure him to make good the claim that he is a loyal Russian patriot. As the narrator later reveals, Razumov is pressed into service by the autocracy to spy on Russian revolutionists living in Switzerland so that the state can take full advantage of his unique relationship with the revolutionary movement. The above scene shows how Razumov's options have been so restricted that he has no place to retire to but Geneva and nothing to do there but to serve the cynical Russian autocracy.

The old teacher of languages, of course, goes on to present the working out of the peculiar pressures that all but determine the course of Razumov's life, but the moral discovery he makes has already been articulated: only some supporting evidence remains to be presented for the reader to understand fully the basis of his assessment of Russia. The question then arises: what is Conrad's judgment of the psychology of Russia and how is it related to what the narrator says about Russia? Conrad nowhere denies the accuracy of his narrator's commentary; in fact the only implied criticism of the old teacher of languages is in his own self-effacement: he repeatedly denies his capacity to have created Razumov. The tale's opening paragraph is one such denial:

> To begin with I wish to disclaim the possession of those high gifts of imagination and expression which would have enabled my pen to create for the reader the personality of the man who called himself, after the Russian custom, Cyril son of Isidor--Kirylo Sidorovitch--Razumov.(3)

He notes that a significant portion of Razumov's story was revealed to him by Razumov's journal, the remainder being derived from his personal experience of Razumov in Geneva. These facts, however, are Conrad's creation, and since they are the source of and the supporting

evidence for the narrator's commentary, to explore Conrad's implied judgment of Russia would be to reiterate what has already been said. Yet the teacher of languages himself is also Conrad's creation, and the novel explores both the psychology of Russia and the process of judging. The moral discovery Conrad presents in Under Western Eyes therefore concerns both of these subjects, and like that of the old teacher of languages, it cannot be summarized in a single word—if it could have been, why should a full-length novel have been written? Conrad's discovery is embodied in his depiction of Razumov's and the narrator's experiences and is the result of the author's having wrestled with the moral issues raised by those experiences. That discovery involves, first, the realization that when the imagination is controlled by reason, as it is in the narrator's case, accurate judgments can be achieved and justified; it involves also a collaboration with the narrator as he struggles to discover the meaning of those unusual turns taken by the life of Razumov.

Not all of Conrad's tales that have been widely acclaimed as great works, however, are as successful as Under Western Eyes: Lord Jim and Chance are two such tales. In them, Conrad fails to achieve his moral discovery because he allows the experiences he portrays to take precedence over what those experiences mean. Lord Jim, says Albert J. Guerard, Jr., is "Conrad's first great impressionist novel"; the impressionist, he continues, tries "to come closer to actual life by presenting experience as a sensitive witness would receive it—casually, digressively, without logical order."

> But the impressionist aim is to achieve a fuller truth than realism can, if necessary by "cheating"; and to create in the reader an intricate play of emotion and a

> rich conflict of sympathy and judgment, a provisional bafflement in the face of experience which turns out to be more complicated than we ever would have dreamed.[11]

The bafflement in Lord Jim, however, is not provisional, as it is shared by reader, narrator, and author alike. Conrad portrays Marlow, as he does the old teacher of languages, struggling with the subject of his tale to discover some kind of truth. Yet Marlow is so enthralled by Jim that his normally sober character quickly succumbs to Jim's romantic escapism. When telling of his first meeting with Jim, Marlow tries to explain why he became interested in hearing Jim's version of the Patna affair:

> "Perhaps, unconsciously, I hoped I would find that something, some profound and redeeming cause, some merciful explanation, some convincing shadow of an excuse. I see well enough now that I hoped for the impossible—for the laying of what is the most obstinate ghost of man's creation, of the uneasy doubt uprising like a mist, secret and gnawing like a worm, and more chilling than the certitude of death—the doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct."(50)

Marlow's acknowledgement that what he hoped for was impossible is an admission that Jim's abandoning the Patna was wrong and a clear violation of the laws of the sea, but that he goes on at great length to search for such an excuse and to relate every detail of that search indicates that his judgment as narrator is being hampered by a strong feeling of sympathy toward his subject.

Toward the middle of the tale, Marlow's emotional involvement with Jim appears to have strengthened. When he is about to begin his account of Jim's successes on Patusan, Marlow remarks:

> "I cannot say I had ever seen him distinctly—not even to this day, after I had my last view of him; but it seemed to me that the less I understood the more I was bound to him in the name of that doubt which is the inseparable part of our knowledge. . . . Even Stein could say no more than that he was romantic. I knew he was one of us. And what business had he to be romantic?"(221,224)

The primary discovery that the experience of Jim yields Marlow, coming by way of Stein, is that Jim is a romantic. Jim's numbingly powerful imagination leads him to abandon the Patna; he is unwilling to acknowledge his own cowardice in leaving the Patna in mid-ocean ("'I had jumped . . . it seems.'"[111]); he is later unable to come to terms with that earlier failure, and he leaves a number of jobs to avoid being recognized as mate of the Patna; he refuses to see Gentleman Brown for what he is and sets him free, with the result that Brown murders Dain Waris and his band of natives.[12] All these things and more justify Stein's calling Jim romantic. Yet Marlow is so much in sympathy with Jim by this time that he cannot agree with Stein's assessment of Jim, much less pass judgment on Jim's romanticism. All Marlow knows for certain about Jim, he says, is this sympathetic chord in himself that Jim has struck.

The last three paragraphs of Lord Jim are further, even more decisive evidence of the failure of Marlow's judgment. Here, although he does accept Stein's judgment of Jim as a romantic, he insists that Jim, because so much "one of us," is yet an enigma and should ever remain so:

> "And that's the end. He passes away under a cloud, inscrutable at heart, forgotten, unforgiven and excessively romantic. . . .
>
> "But we can see him, an obscure conqueror of fame, tearing himself out of the arms of a jealous love at the sign, at the call of his exalted egoism. . . . . Is he satisfied--quite, now, I wonder? We ought to know. He is one of us--and have I not stood up once, like an evoked ghost, to answer for his eternal constancy? Was I so very wrong after all? . . .
>
> "Who knows? He is gone, inscrutable at heart, and the poor girl is leading a sort of soundless, inert life in Stein's house. Stein has aged greatly of late. He feels it himself, and says often that he is 'preparing to leave all this' preparing to leave. . .' while he waves his hand sadly at his butterflies."(416-17)

Instead of grappling with the difficult problems raised by Jim's excessive romanticism, Marlow becomes romantic himself, straining for emotional responses to enigmatic questions and closing out the tale with the wave of a hand. But his own answer to his first question indicates that Jim ought not be an enigma: "We ought to know [whether Jim is satisfied]. He is one of us. . ." If, indeed, "we ought to know," then surely Marlow ought to be able to say what he knows, instead of repeating how inscrutable Jim is. Yet Marlow does not say; instead, as if waving good-bye to Jim with pen in hand, he denies that Jim can be judged ("Who knows?"). "We ought to know" whether Jim is satisfied because he is "one of us," but Marlow finds that because Jim is "one of us" to pass judgment on Jim would be, disconcertingly, to pass judgment on himself, a fellow romantic.

By declining to censure Marlow once he has created him, Conrad himself indulges a romantic inclination to emotionalize instead of judge. Conrad's romanticism, however, is exhibited in more than his presentation of Marlow. It is a well-known fact that Lord Jim was originally projected to be a short story of twenty to twenty-five thousand words, but as Conrad wrote, he found the tale kept getting longer and longer, until finally it reached its present size, about one hundred thousand words. One can understand that a writer might be unable to predict the length of a work in progress, but the novel's clear division into two parts and the rambling nature of Marlow's tale support the contention that Conrad does not have complete control over his material. It is as if Conrad struggles to discover the meaning of Jim's experience while at the same time being afraid of what he might find; yet he continues writing because the struggle

is so interesting.

Conrad himself acknowledges in several places that Lord Jim is seriously flawed; in a letter to Edward Garnett four months after the novel was completed, he suggests that

> What is fundamentally wrong with the book—the cause and the effect—is want of power. I do not mean the 'power' of reviewers' jargon. I mean the want of illuminating imagination. I wanted to obtain a sort of lurid light out (of) the very events. You know what I have done—alas! I haven't been strong enough to breathe the right sort of life into my clay—the revealing life.[13]

Lord Jim contains some very good writing, but Conrad fails in this novel because he does not present an imaginative understanding of the characters and events he portrays: there is no "revéaling life" to quicken the presentation. Lord Jim is a failure because Conrad shirks his responsibility to judge Jim.

An older, somewhat wiser Marlow narrates Chance, but this novel too lacks "power." The narrative technique employed in Chance is similar to that of Lord Jim: Marlow speaks at great length on several occasions, sometimes relating his own experiences of the story's primary characters and sometimes paraphrasing what others have told him. In Chance, however, Marlow's knowledge of most of the events he recreates is gained from what others have told him, and the reader is constantly reminded of this fact. This distances the reader from events that ought to provide justification for Marlow's judgments, and the telling of Marlow's tale by yet another narrator—the "I" who listens to Marlow and occasionally interrupts him—increases that distance. The emphasis in Chance is much more heavily on the narrator's obtaining his information than it is on the subject of the tale or on the narrator's struggle to discover the meaning of the tale. As Henry James noted, Chance

sets Conrad apart as "a votary of the way to do a thing that shall make it undergo most doing."[14]

But Conrad's purpose in presenting the novel this way is, as can be inferred from the title, to stress a point Marlow makes repeatedly throughout the tale: that chance plays the decisive role in the life of Flora de Barral and in the lives of others, just as it plays a decisive role in Marlow's acquisition of the information necessary to tell the story. Perhaps chance's most crucial intervention in Flora's life occurs when her governess and Charley reject her. After remarking that Flora's ignorance of evil in the world is about to be disrupted, Marlow comments:

> "Yes, that very young girl, almost no more than a child—this was what was going to happen to her. And if you ask me how, wherefore, for what reason? I will answer you: Why, by chance! By the merest chance, as things do happen, lucky and unlucky, terrible or tender, important or unimportant; and even things which are neither, things so completely neutral in character that you would wonder why they do happen at all if you didn't know that they, too, carry in their insignificance the seeds of further incalculable chances. . . ."(99-100)

If Dickens had said only that Pip's great expectations were fulfilled because of his chance meeting with a convict who would later try to make him a gentleman, Great Expectations would be a far lesser novel than it is. The important fact of Pip's life is not that chance stepped in, but what Pip makes of the chances he has. Likewise, in Under Western Eyes, Conrad does not permit his narrator to be satisfied with saying that Razumov is the victim of chance, even though chance had much to do with Haldin's choosing Razumov's rooms in which to hide. By emphasizing the role of chance here, Marlow rejects the opportunity to assess the all too human forces that contributed to the greed of Charley and the governess and, for that matter to the

fascination with thrift that had captured the British imagination and allowed de Barral to prosper:

Conrad, however, does show Marlow exploring the British fascination with thrift and dramatizing the governess and Charley as they act out of sheer greed. Why then should Marlow insist that what happens to Flora happens by chance, and why, since a good part of Chance analyzes the motives underlying the plot, should Marlow keep on insisting throughout the tale that chance is the most important factor? Everywhere in Chance Marlow's attitude to the subject of his tale is very much that of the casual observer: he considers the lives of the Fynes, the de Barrals, Captain Anthony, and others to be the subjects for idle speculation. Although he occasionally takes great care in getting the tale told accurately, he does not take his story seriously: he views everything and everyone in it from the outside. Consider how Marlow finishes one of his many lectures on the subject of women:

> "'Sensation at any cost,' is their secret device. All the virtues are not enough for them; they want also all the crimes for their own. And why? because in such completeness there is power—the kind of thrill they love most. . . ."
>
> "Do you expect me to agree with all this?" I interrupted.
>
> "No, it isn't necessary," said Marlow feeling the check of his eloquence, but with a great effort at amiability. "You need not even understand it. . . ."(63)

If Marlow were at all serious about the matter, surely he would want to express his comments in such a way as to be understood. Why else should he even bother to utter comments in the first place, unless he simply enjoys hearing himself talk? Marlow, it appears, is more interested in speaking his own unsupported opinions than he is in rendering an accurate assessment of his subject. His remarks about the importance of chance and his comments on the nature of

woman are both uttered simply as an opinion to be neither doubted nor justified, nor even understood.

The other narrator, Marlow's indefatigable listener, indicates by his incredulous interruption that Marlow is being borne away by the seductions of his own eloquence,and that interruption might be read as a signal from Conrad that the reader should be suspicious of Marlow's commentary. But if this is the case, the protest is far too feeble to countervail the Marlovian commentary with which the novel is so heavily laden. It seems that Conrad, like Marlow, is so enamored of his own eloquence that he does not take the story of Flora de Barral seriously. Occasional protests are issued, but Conrad indulges Marlow at such great length that these protests themselves become little more than a different dimension of Marlow's amusing little parlor game. If Conrad had taken this novel seriously, he would not, for example, have concluded it thus:

> "This was yesterday," added Marlow, lolling in the arm-chair lazily. "I haven't heard yet; but I expect to hear any moment. . . . What on earth are you grinning at in this sarcastic manner? I am not afraid of going to church with a friend. Hang it all, for all my belief in Chance I am not exactly a pagan. . . ."(447)

The description of Marlow "lolling in the arm-chair lazily" vividly reflects Marlow's unserious attitude toward his tale, and the final undercutting even of chance's longstanding ascendancy casts a shadow of doubt over all Marlow has claimed to be the work of chance.

Conrad's lack of seriousness in this novel brings to mind something Henry James once wrote about the novelist vis-à-vis the historian:

> Certain accomplished novelists have a habit of giving themselves away which must often bring tears to the eyes of people who take their fiction seriously. I was lately struck, in reading over many pages of Anthony Trollope,

> with his want of discretion in this particular. In a digression, a parenthesis or an aside, he concedes to the reader that he and this trusting friend are only 'making believe.' He admits that the events he narrates have not really happened, and that he can give his narrative any turn the reader may like best. Such a betrayal of a sacred office seems to me, I confess, a terrible crime; it is what I mean by the attitude of apology, and it shocks me every whit as much in Trollope as it would have shocked me in Gibbon or Macaulay. It implies that the novelist is less occupied in looking for the truth . . . than the historian, and in doing so it deprives him at a stroke of all his standing-room.[15]

Chance, however, is not a novel on which Conrad's standing as a major English novelist ought to be based, nor is it typical of Conrad at his best. Rather, in every work of his that has a claim to greatness, Conrad demonstrates a sincere devotion to the art of the novel, a high degree of seriousness, and a strong desire to discover truth.

Conrad of course is only human and occasionally fails, some times more grievously than others; in fact, some of his greatest achievements are seriously damaged by failures in judgment. This thesis concentrates on those works of Conrad's that have genuine claims to greatness: Heart of Darkness, Victory, The Shadow-Line, Typhoon, The Secret Agent, and Nostromo. It justifies their claims to greatness by showing Conrad's judgment in them to be incisive, penetrating, and accurate, and it tempers those claims by assessing the damage caused to each by the occasional failures of Conrad's judgment. "The Secret Sharer" is also thoroughly studied even though its longstanding position as one of Conrad's best works is disputed: the story's basic flaws are errors of judgment that Conrad tries to gloss over with excessive feeling, a technique he all too frequently employs in other works either to avoid judging or to cast a more favorable light on a mistaken judgment. By way of contrast, the

discussion of this tale's faults shows how truly great Conrad is in other tales, especially The Shadow-Line, a tale with which "The Secret Sharer" has much in common. Under Western Eyes, although its first part is brilliantly conceived and executed, does not merit fuller consideration than it has already been given. Conrad lapses too far into melodrama when he shows the working out of the dilemma in which he has placed Razumov; the final two-thirds of the novel cannot equal in power or penetration the original one-third that provided their groundwork.

II

Heart of Darkness:

The Ascendancy of Judgment

Unlike Lord Jim or Chance, Heart of Darkness deserves the praise it is given in essays and classrooms. The high valuation of this tale, however, has generally been granted for the wrong reasons. Many critics and teachers, agreeing with W. Y. Tindall, praise Heart of Darkness for the profundity they feel in the darkness pervading the tale.[1] Probably the most common way of accounting for this profundity is to attribute it to a Conradian search into the author's own unconscious or subconscious mind. The most extensive and influential treatment of the tale as a "journey into self"[2] is found in Guerard's Conrad the Novelist; in fact, Guerard's treatment of Conrad generally is done from this same perspective. As Leggatt is the narrator's double in "The Secret Sharer," so, says Guerard, is Kurtz Marlow's double:

> It little matters what, in terms of psychological symbolism, we call this double or say he represents: whether the Freudian id or the Jungian shadow or more vaguely the outlaw. And I am afraid it is impossible to say where Conrad's conscious understanding of his story began and ended. The important thing is that the introspective plunge and powerful dream seem true; and are therefore inevitably moving.[3]

There is no question that these critics generally have good reasons for their analyses, but by concentrating their attention on the tale's emotional effectiveness and relying heavily on psychological concepts they demonstrate rather a submission to the tale than a mastery over it. They tend to overemphasize the connotative power of

language at the expense of the denotative and concentrate so single-mindedly on the symbolic impact of Marlow's tale that they give short shrift to, or totally ignore, the experience itself and the judgments Marlow makes upon it.

In Heart of Darkness, Marlow's Congo experience and the circumstances surrounding it are dramatized and evaluated by Marlow as he tells his story to his small audience on board the Nellie. By employing Marlow as his narrator, Conrad is able to dramatize also Marlow's struggle to reach and articulate Marlow's judgments of his own experience. Marlow's repeated references to voices, words, and language as significant parts of his experience indicate that Marlow tells his tale not simply to make his listeners feel what he felt but to articulate for himself and for them the meaning of his Congo experience. Furthermore, the statements Marlow makes to evaluate the things he judges justify the insistent concern he expresses throughout the tale with motives, reasons, and meaning. Conrad presents Marlow's struggle with these things to show how man can, through language, order and evaluate a mysterious and horrifying experience.

When Marlow says, near the beginning of his tale, "And this also . . . has been one of the dark places of the earth"(48), and refers to the Roman conquest of Britain, he is not simply making a connection to render the story more relevant to Englishmen with no personal experience of the earth's uncivilized places, nor is he noting merely that in England, as in Africa, man can experience the horror of coming face to face with his own unconscious mind. His use of the perfect tense is quite intentional: Britain was once itself uncivilized, but is no longer. Marlow's use of light-dark imagery is in line with the longstanding practice of using this motif to

contrast more highly civilized places or historical periods with those less civilized. The period in history after the fall of the Roman empire, is traditionally referred to as the Dark Ages; a later period, characterized by the prominence of rationalist philosophy, is called the Enlightenment. The light-dark contrast was a staple motif in the British imperialist's vocabulary, and it was used to speak of the higher motives that ought to displace mercantilism as the motivating factor behind the conquest of foreign territories; it also was often used to obscure to the public the decidedly more compelling avarice of the conquerors. Here is an excerpt from a speech of William Pitt, delivered in 1792:

> Grieved am I to think that there should be a single person in this country, much more that there should be a single member of the British Parliament, who can look on the present dark, uncultivated, and uncivilized state of Africa as a ground for continuing the slave trade, as a ground for not only refusing to attempt the improvement of that continent, but even for hindering and interrupting every ray of light which might otherwise break in upon it—as a ground for refusing to it the common chance and the common means with which other nations have been blessed of emerging from their barbarism.[4]

The "dark" here is clearly the uncivilized, not the unconscious or the incomprehensible.

This same light-dark motif is used throughout Heart of Darkness to describe Marlow's experiences in Africa, and it is particularly effective in enriching the atmosphere that provides the setting for Marlow's tale. When the anonymous first-person narrator describes the sun setting over London just as Marlow is about to speak, he is preparing the reader for the battle with darkness Marlow is about to become engaged in. As the darkness deepens all round the Nellie, the feeling of "Mournful gloom, brooding motionless"(45) over the waters establishes the mood of the story the reader is about

to witness.

Heart of Darkness, however, is as much about Kurtz as it is about Marlow, and it is about the nature of civilization more than it is about either of these men personally, for this tale has as its subject the struggle of man against meaninglessness and disorder. The darkness pervading the tale is not simply a symbol for the barbaric habits of uncivilized human beings; rather, it denotes those areas of human experience that have not yet been organized into meaning. Marlow asserts his vitality by attempting to make sense of horror and absurdity. He does this first by devoting himself fully to his job as captain of the steamboat and later by reflecting on his experiences and evaluating them as he relates those experiences to his audience on the Nellie. He maintains his self-possession even when confronted by the most disgusting and puzzling absurdities because he has a reservoir of training in the discipline of the merchant service on which he can rely, and he learns from his experiences later when he recreates them verbally.

The climactic event in the tale involves Kurtz's death, his last words and Marlow's subsequent commentary. After listening to Kurtz say "The horror! The horror!" and later hearing the report of his death, Marlow says, "I went no more near the remarkable man who had pronounced a judgment upon the adventures of his soul and on this earth"(150). A little later Marlow elaborates on this comment:

> "He had something to say. He said it. . . . He had summed up--he had judged. 'The horror!' . . . It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory!"(151)

If it had not been for Marlow's commentary, it is quite possible the reader would have been inclined to think of Kurtz's statement as

anything but a victory. In fact, some critics insist, in spite of Marlow's analysis of Kurtz's last words, that Kurtz died in the grip of "an intense and hopeless despair"(149), as Marlow suggests a little earlier.[5] But the despair Marlow attributes to Kurtz is what Marlow had seen in him prior to Kurtz's utterance of those last words, and in fact it is this despair that Kurtz conquers by pronouncing judgment on it.

Kurtz's victory is moral, but it is also preeminently verbal. Marlow briefly mentions Kurtz's talents as a painter, and he suggests at the tale's end that Kurtz "had been essentially a great musician"(153)—a suggestion which has very little substance indeed. He notes as he tells his tale that "to this day I am unable to say what was Kurtz's profession, whether he ever had any—which was the greatest of his talents"(153), but this comment is nothing less than a denial of the Kurtz he actually presents. The tale makes it clear that the talent that is most significant for Marlow, and for the reader, since Marlow's Kurtz is the only one there is, is Kurtz's eloquence. If Kurtz is an artist, it is his ability to use words that makes him so. Earlier in the tale, before he is overpowered by sentimentality in his describing of the episode with Kurtz's Intended, Marlow expresses quite effectively his understanding of the essential Kurtz:

> "The man presented himself as a voice. Not of course that I did not connect him with some sort of action. Hadn't I been told in all the tones of jealousy and admiration that he had collected, bartered, swindled, or stolen more ivory than all the other agents together? That was not the point. The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out preeminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words—the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the

> most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness." (113-14)

The verbal power Kurtz exercises has the capability of civilizing ("the pulsating stream of light") or exploiting the natives of central Africa, and the portion of the report on the "Suppression of Savage Customs" that Marlow presents and analyzes makes this dual capability perfectly clear. The main portion of the report asserts that "By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded"(118), but the altruistic tone of the report is belied by the postscript where Kurtz indicates that the good he proposes is death to the native population and the power he mentions is homicidal: "Exterminate all the brutes!"

Kurtz's last words are his recognition of the evil he has done in devoting his eloquence to the spoliation of Africa. These words are themselves the only instance of Kurtz's using his talent for good. But if Marlow's audience is to understand and agree with his assessment of these last words as a moral victory, Kurtz's life must be shown to justify the judgment Kurtz passes on it. The postscript is substantial evidence in favor of Kurtz's judgment of himself, especially since Kurtz's lust for ivory caused the death of a number of rebellious natives (whose heads pay him posthumous homage), since he threatened to kill the harlequin for a handful of ivory, and since Kurtz himself ordered the attack on Marlow's boat. Kurtz's inclination to kill both natives and Europeans without compunction is noted and rendered vividly in Marlow's account of these and other actions by Kurtz. Kurtz's life, however, can perhaps be best understood by examining the portions of his report that Marlow deems a necessary part of his tale. "He began," says Marlow, "with the argument that we whites,

from the point of development we had arrived at, 'must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity'"(118). That Kurtz had taken what he saw to be a power for nearly limitless good and perverted it to serve selfish ends is clear enough from the dramatized events of the tale: his setting himself up as a god for the natives to adore simply so they would be moved to gather immense amounts of ivory for him ("he came to them with thunder and lightning, you know—and they had never seen anything like it"); his leaving the boat in spite of his illness in order to serve as the object of worship for native witch doctors; his encouraging and then restraining the frenzied natives eager to destroy Marlow's rescue mission and to kill those who had come to take Kurtz away.

Marlow's dramatic presentation of his first vision of the severed and shrunken heads in Kurtz's courtyard is especially powerful, and the commentary Marlow offers afterward is indeed a revealing analysis of Kurtz's essential character:

> " . . . I want you clearly to understand that there was nothing exactly profitable in these heads being there. They only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him—some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can't say. I think the knowledge came to him at last—only at the very last. But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude—and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core. . . . I put down the glass, and the head that appeared near enough to be spoken to seemed at once to have leaped away from me into inaccessible distance.(131)

The apparent tentativeness of Marlow's commentary, as implied in the

repetition of "I think," is here not because Marlow is in any doubt about whether Kurtz really did know "at the very last" that he was "hollow at the core," but because Marlow is careful to allow his audience to hear Kurtz's last words before the final judgment is passed on him; Marlow does not want to pressure his audience into agreeing with him before it has all the facts. Kurtz is "hollow at the core" apparently because he employs his eloquence to further self-interest rather than to do good. He uses "the unbounded power of eloquence--of words--of burning noble words" to charm the Europeans who were to read the report into believing that there was really some good being done on behalf of civilization in that remote corner of the world, when in fact the men in charge of the operation took great pleasure in wantonly murdering the natives they were supposed to be helping. Kurtz's report pays lip service to virtue; except for the brutally ironic imperative offered in the postscript, the report offers no practical hints for achieving the good it praises so highly. The theories advanced on the ways to assert influence over the native population lend themselves equally to both good and evil, and Kurtz's moral vacuity allows him to speak of evil as good. If Kurtz had known what value civilization had that could justify its imposition on savages, and if he had had the moral conviction to pursue good ends rather than selfish ones, he could have assessed that value in his report and suggested practical improvements that could be made. But he does not, until the last, know the value of civilization nor of language itself, so he writes a report amounting to little other than a blank cheque drawn on the superstitions of the natives and made to the order of any greedy, unscrupulous adventurer willing to risk his health in the African jungle. The report is an evil use of

the power of language, and Kurtz's last words are a confession of the man's moral irresponsibility.

But if Marlow's presentation of Kurtz's life is sufficient to justify Kurtz's judgment of himself, why should Marlow repeatedly use adjectives like "inconceivable" and "incomprehensible" to describe certain elements in his story of Kurtz? This question has intrigued many who have written on Heart of Darkness, especially since F. R. Leavis's notorious attack on the tale's "adjectival insistence" in The Great Tradition. A typical occurrence of adjectival insistence is found in the description of Marlow's approach to the inner station through the dense, damp, silent jungle. The stillness Marlow felt very keenly in that jungle "did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention"(93). Leavis objects to adjectival insistence because, he claims, Conrad uses this technique to "impose on his readers and on himself . . . a 'significance' that is merely an emotional insistence on the presence of what he can't produce."[6] Leavis implies that neither Conrad nor Marlow are to be trusted when they inject into the tale the kind of commentary that repeatedly uses words like "inconceivable" as an analysis of something in the tale. These words, however, are not merely an indication of an authorial or narrative inadequacy; rather, they are an attempt to evoke shallow emotional responses, and they do so at the expense of the best parts of the tale. When Marlow says:

> "No eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity. He struggled with himself, too. I saw it—I heard it. I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself."(145)

he is denying his own presentation of Kurtz's hollowness and his own

ability to tell tales. His tale provides a vividly articulate rendering of the essential Kurtz, accompanied by an acute analysis of Kurtz's moral deficiency. Yet here he denies all this and evokes from his audience a thrilled, but hollow response. This would not be so bad were it not that Marlow does this same sort of thing repeatedly.

Yet another distressing occurrence of adjectival insistence occurs earlier in the tale where Marlow, again, is trying to describe Kurtz:

> "The wilderness had patted him on the head, and behold, it was like a ball—an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and—lo!—he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation." (115)

The use of "behold" and "lo" with their strongly Biblical overtones is certainly appropriate and effective in describing the faithless Kurtz as deity, but the insistence on "inconceivable" almost negates the effect. Kurtz's report and Marlow's account of its enactment are more than sufficient to provide the information necessary to justify Kurtz's and Marlow's judgments on what Kurtz accomplished in the Congo. By referring to "inconceivable mysteries" and "some devilish initiation" Marlow insists that the mysteries and the initiation are important to an understanding of Kurtz, but he insists in a way that urges the reader to judge as Kurtz's experience whatever his imagination can conjure up instead of placing specific actions before him. The horror of Kurtz's way of life, however, has already been amply presented; this presentation and the commentary it justifies <u>are</u> Kurtz. Since Kurtz is a fictitious character, there is no source but Marlow's tale from which to obtain further evidence of Kurtz's evilness. By insisting there is more of Kurtz than he presents, Marlow violates his reader's trust and proves himself too to be at

least a little hollow. Kurtz's report is evil because it pays only lip service to good and encourages rapaciousness; some of Marlow's commentary is likewise irresponsible because it sometimes is an analysis of what does not exist: it attempts to give value to a nullity.

A common method of explaining away this defect is to concede, as W. Y. Tindall does in speaking of Youth, that Marlow is a less than perfect narrator, and to assert that this tale is only that much greater because Conrad recognizes the flaw in his narrator and writes his story in order to expose it.[7] But if Conrad wishes to expose Marlow as an unreliable narrator, he makes a terrible mess of it. He first presents the dramatized events of Kurtz's life and Kurtz's judgment of that life; then he presents Marlow's judgment of Kurtz and Marlow's affirmation of Kurtz's judgment; and finally, he has the anonymous first-person narrator outside Marlow's tale express his affirmation of the judgments of both Kurtz and Marlow through his creation of a setting that fully complements Marlow's tale. If Conrad had intended his reader to see Marlow as an inadequate narrator, he should at least have questioned Marlow's reliability somewhere in the tale instead of indicating at every turn that he considers Marlow's tale accurate and his judgment sound. Responsible readers ought to judge Marlow's tale and Conrad's presentation of it, but to claim that Conrad judges the tale adversely is to insist on what is not there. It is wrong for Marlow to comment on actions he does not describe, and it is just as wrong for a critic to comment on an unexpressed judgment of Marlow as if it were an essential component of Conrad's creation.

The fact is, however, that Marlow's adjectival insistence is Conrad's, and what makes it such a lamentable and damaging fault is that the tale itself is designed to demonstrate how judgment is an essential human activity. Quite often Marlow inquires into motives, purposes, reasons why people do what he sees them doing, and he does not rest until he finds out. How Marlow discovered Kurtz's reason for being the way he was and why Kurtz's recognition of his own hollowness was a moral victory have already been discussed. The remainder of Marlow's tale is further evidence that his striving for an understanding of human purpose is the tale's essential thrust: Heart of Darkness is an account not only of Marlow's story and his analysis of it, but a dramatization of the judging process itself, a process both moral and verbal.

As he travels along the coast of Africa toward the mouth of the Congo, Marlow says, "The voice of the surf heard now and then was a positive pleasure, like the speech of a brother. It was something natural, that had its reason, that had a meaning"(61). Marlow's kinship with the sea is a result of his background in the British Merchant Service; it is the longstanding tradition of that intensely civilized way of life that has given meaning to the sound of the surf for Marlow and that has led Marlow to humanize it in his comment. Marlow can say that "For a time I would feel I belonged still to a world of straightforward facts" because the Merchant Service has already civilized life at sea and because he is so accustomed to the meaning of the surf, for example, that the surf and what it means to him as a sailor are inseparable facts. His vision of the French gunboat shelling the bush, however, soon undercuts his feeling of security, and he begins to realize that whatever purpose or meaning

things have does not exist a priori but must be established and evaluated by human beings:

> "Once, I remember, we came upon a man-of-war anchored off the coast. There wasn't even a shed there, and she was shelling the bush. It appears the French had one of their wars going on thereabouts. Her ensign dropped limp like a rag; the muzzles of the long six-inch guns stuck out all over the low Hull; the greasy, slimy swell swung her up lazily and let her down, swaying her thin masts. In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop would go one of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech--and nothing happened. Nothing could happen. There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight; and it was not dissipated by somebody on board assuring me earnestly there was a camp of natives--he called them enemies!--hidden out of sight somewhere.(61-62)

Marlow is wrenched abruptly from the intensely civilized world of the sea and now finds himself in an absurd situation. He is assured that an enemy camp is being shelled, but he knows that the natives under fire have only been called enemies to provide the semblance of a moral justification for the sport of hunting them. This knowledge is reinforced later when the white passengers on Marlow's boat insist on firing into the jungle at the natives and act disappointed when Marlow terminates their sport with a blast from the whistle. Leavis says of the above passage that the author's comment "is not separable from the thing rendered, but seems to emerge from the vibration of this as part of the tone. At least, this is Conrad's art at its best."[8] Marlow's assessment of the situation is expressed so well it would be foolish to try to separate that assessment from the rendering of the events themselves. Even the "incomprehensible"--one of those adjectives overused in Marlow's speaking of Kurtz--contributes to the passage's effectiveness. The inclusion of this word as a negative parenthetical comment serves neither to stir up

the audience's emotions nor to give their imaginations free reign; rather, it is a convincing expression of total disbelief of the egoism of those miniscule Frenchmen shooting their popguns at Africa, apparently convinced they could conquer that vast continent by shooting at it. The incident is every bit as comprehensible as Kurtz is, and Marlow's subdued exclamation of incomprehensibility reinforces that fact.

Marlow comments several times on the naming technique the Europeans have developed to justify to themselves their barbaric treatment of the natives. In the above passage he scoffs at the man defending the shelling of the coastal area for claiming the natives are "enemies"; the natives in the chain gang are called "workers," those in the grove of death "criminals." Marlow sums up his assessment of the practice when relating the conversation he had with the harlequin within sight of the ornamented fence-posts in Kurtz's courtyard:

> "I had no idea of the conditions, he said: these heads were the heads of rebels. I shocked him excessively by laughing. Rebels! What would be the next definition I was to hear? There had been enemies, criminals, workers—and these were rebels. Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks."(132)

In all these cases, Marlow perceives that the moral vacancy of the Europeans shows itself in their perverse redefinition of their words; he laughs because this way of veiling their selfish purpose is so obviously a sham, and yet the harlequin accepts the new terminology at face value. Conrad's analysis of the language of imperialism could in itself provide the basis for a very valuable study of modern political English, but it is enough to say here that Marlow's tone in addressing this point is the expression of a

well-considered and accurate judgment of this imperialist technique. Furthermore, Conrad's presentation of Marlow's arriving at that judgment is a convincing dramatization of Marlow's ability to evaluate the things going on around him.[9]

Marlow's meeting with the company's accountant and learning of his accomplishments is another brilliantly rendered dramatization of the judging process. Marlow visits the grove of death, the third of the insane, nightmarish visions of imperialism at work, and he is so appalled by what he sees there that he flees to the station for refuge:

> "When near the buildings I met a white man, in such an unexpected elegance of get-up that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand. He was amazing, and had a penholder behind his ear.
>
> "I shook hands with this miracle, and I learned he was the Company's chief accountant, and that all the book-keeping was done at this station. He had come out for a moment, he said, 'to get a breath of fresh air.' The expression sounded wonderfully odd, with its suggestion of sedentary desk-life. I wouldn't have mentioned the fellow to you at all, only it was from his lips that I first heard the name of the man who is so indissolubly connected with the memories of that time. Moreover, I respected the fellow. Yes; I respected his collars, his vast cuffs, his brushed hair. His appearance was certainly that of a hairdresser's dummy; but in the great demoralization of the land he kept up his appearance. That's backbone. His starched collars and got-up shirt-fronts were achievements of character. He had been out nearly three years; and, later, I could not help asking him how he managed to sport such linen. He had just the faintest blush, and said modestly, 'I've been teaching one of the native women about the station. It was difficult. She had a distaste for the work.' Thus this man had verily accomplished something. And he was devoted to his books, which were in apple-pie order.
>
> "Everything else in the station was in a muddle,—heads, things, buildings. . . ."(68)

The first thing that strikes Marlow about this man is the startling nature of his appearance—not simply the fact he is white and wears white things, but that in the midst of the squalor and chaos

of the jungle from which Marlow has just come there should be a man so well-groomed and so orderly. He strikes Marlow as truly elegant: this is his preliminary judgment of the man and is based solely on his appearance. The "unexpected elegance" brilliantly expresses both Marlow's emotional reaction and his assessment of the contrast between the grove of death and this amazing vision.

As the second paragraph opens, Marlow still knows this man only as a visual phenomenon, a "miracle," but he immediately discovers his role in the company's activities and his official title, that of chief accountant. The surprising sanity of the man is dramatized and analysed briefly in the next two sentences, and this attribute perfectly complements the idea of the civilizing function of work implied earlier in the naming of the men's job and in Marlow's reaction to the sudden shift in surroundings he experiences. At this point, Marlow's analysis of the apparition is still vague; the "wonderfully odd," even with the help of the explanatory phrases following it, does not express a very clear judgment. The next sentence, however, states Marlow's assessment of the accountant's relationship to Marlow's memory of Kurtz, indicating that this is the only reason the man is even being mentioned. But when he proceeds to note, "Moreover, I respected the fellow," he is revising that assessment and articulating a more accurate judgment of the accountant's significance. Marlow's assertion of his respect for the accountant is reinforced by his articulation of his understanding of the contrast between "the great demoralization of the land" and the accountant's elegant sanity. In the midst of the relatively long sentences surrounding it, the "That's backbone" that clinches Marlow's judgment has the ring of finality and certainty.

The final portion of the above passage presents the cause behind the accountant's appearance and shows that not only has the man succeeded in keeping up his own appearance but that he had to train, to civilize, a native woman in order to do so. The civilizing quality of bookwork and laundering is thereby dramatized, and Marlow concludes this lengthy presentation of the accountant with such certitude about his value to civilization that one would think he had been just presenting a logical argument rather than a narrative account: "Thus this man had verily accomplished something." The refreshing feeling of this experience for Marlow is similar to what he experiences when he finds An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship and when he works on his sunken steamboat. Work, especially the work associated with the tradition of British seafaring, is one means of defending oneself from a demoralizing environment; the other is the act of articulating one's judgment of that environment. Both play a part in Marlow's consideration of the chief accountant.

Like the accountant, Marlow himself trains a native to work for him, the helmsman of the steamboat, and the dramatization of Marlow's assessment of the man's worth is especially striking and significant. As soon as Marlow realizes his helmsman is dead, he finds someone else to take the helm and struggles frantically to remove his own blood-filled shoes.

> "'He is dead,' murmured the fellow, immensely impressed. 'No doubt about it,' said I, tugging like mad at the shoe-laces. 'And by the way, I suppose Mr. Kurtz is dead as well by this time.'
>
> "For the moment that was the dominant thought. There was a sense of extreme disappointment, as though I had found out I had been striving after something altogether without a substance. I couldn't have been more disgusted if I had traveled all this way for the sole purpose of talking with Mr. Kurtz. Talking with. . . . I flung one

> shoe overboard, and became aware that that was exactly what I had been looking forward to—a talk with Kurtz. I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing."(113)

Marlow's analysis of his most important motive for travelling to the inner station is presented spontaneously as part of the vividly rendered action of the tale. His intimate relation to the dead helmsman, rendered as it is with such concrete immediacy, provides a dramatic contrast to Marlow's fascination with Kurtz as a disembodied voice. Kurtz is never presented as much more than that; in fact, the above passage serves as an introduction to the lengthy digression on Kurtz's eloquence that includes Marlow's analysis of the language in Kurtz's report. At the end of the digression Marlow continues:

> "No; I can't forget him [Kurtz], though I am not prepared to affirm the fellow was exactly worth the life we lost in getting to him. I missed my late helmsman awfully,—I missed him even while his body was still lying in the pilot-house. Perhaps you will think it passing strange this regret for a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara. Well, don't you see, he had done something, he had steered; for months I had him at my back—a help—an instrument. It was a kind of partnership. He steered for me—I had to look after him, worried about his deficiencies, and thus a subtle bond had been created, of which I only became aware when it was suddenly broken. And the intimate profundity of that look he gave me when he received his hurt remains to this day in my memory—like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment."(119)

That the helmsman was worth more to Marlow than Kurtz is confirmed by the drastically different attitudes Marlow expresses toward the disposal of their bodies: he describes his burying of the helmsman in the river as a "simple funeral,"(120) but he affirms the essential inhumanity of Kurtz by performing no rite at all over his corpse. In fact, he does not even care to have a hand in getting rid of the body, and he speaks of the burial with disgust: "But I am of course aware that next day the pilgrims buried something in a muddy hole"(150).

The helmsman was worth something because he and Marlow worked together and because Marlow could rely on him, while also accepting responsibility for his deficiencies. The bond established between them Marlow recognizes to be a "partnership" and a "kinship" despite the helmsman's having been a savage. It was a bond founded on their work, their routine interdependence in performing a purposeful activity. What makes Kurtz so worthless by comparison is his lack of the kind of moral sense that can be established through physical work and its regular routine. It is therefore quite appropriate that Marlow's initial analysis of Kurtz's eloquence should occur between the helmsman's death and Marlow's valuation of the helmsman. That one's physical being is inseparable from one's intellectual life is something D. H. Lawrence understood and expressed convincingly in his best works; that Conrad should establish his point here so dramatically is strong indication of an essential agreement between these two great modern novelists who are in so many other ways so very different.

Conrad's dramatizations of Marlow's judging the manager and the harlequin are also significant, but are not different in kind from the episodes already considered involving the accountant, Kurtz, and the helmsman. There are, however, several episodes different in kind from those discussed above that do require special consideration. They are Marlow's encounters with the three principal female characters in the tale: his aunt, the native woman, and Kurtz's Intended. The portraits of the first two are Marlow's expression of the absolute irreconcilability of civilized and uncivilized woman, and their presentation is supposed to provide the groundwork for Marlow's interview with the Intended at the end of his tale. Marlow's

commentary on his aunt is substantially justified by his presentation of her, but Marlow generalizes his conclusions about his aunt beyond what the presentation will bear and thereby attempts to prejudice his audience in favor of his later assessment of the Intended. That later judgment itself, however, is unsatisfactory, as it is a result of Marlow's submission to the emotions her presence has stirred up in him rather than a reasoned consideration of her. Marlow's presentation of the native woman is suggestive, but does not lead to any judgment of her; she exists simply to inject a vague emotional resonance into Marlow's generalization about women and to suggest herself as the savage counterpart of the aunt and the personification of the Intended's essential mysteriousness.

The portrait of the aunt is the briefest and by far the most effective of the three. After reaching an agreement on the terms of his employment with the company, Marlow visits her and they exchange confidences over tea:

> "In the course of these confidences it became quite plain to me I had been represented to the wife of the high dignitary, and goodness knows to how many more people besides, as an exceptional and gifted creature . . . . It appeared, however, I was also one of the Workers, with a capital—you know. Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle. There had been a lot of such rot let loose in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent woman, living right in the rush of all that humbug, got carried off her feet. She talked about 'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways,' till upon my word, she made me quite uncomfortable. I ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit.
>
> "'You forget, dear Charlie, that the labourer is worthy of his hire,' she said, brightly. It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over."(50)

The aunt's refusal to believe the company is simply a business is powerfully rendered through the Biblical quotation (Luke x, 7) she utters by way of refutation. The words she speaks are those of Christ as he sent his disciples forth to spread the word of the gospel, and, of course, to spread the gospel was the task which the propagandists of the time promoted so effectively as a cover to the material and spiritual exploitation of the less civilized places of the earth. Marlow, however, is not content to judge his aunt on the basis of her belief in this propaganda, and so, as in Chance, he proceeds to comment on what he believes to be the true nature of woman. The facts of the presentation do not justify this commentary; in fact, they go a long way toward disproving it. Women did not originate the propaganda that sweeps the aunt away: the world Marlow says is too beautiful to exist was actually created by men like Kurtz. The closing sentence of the passage is a further distortion of the presentation: Marlow anticipates here the action he takes at the end of the tale to protect the Intended from the truth he believes would destroy her world, but he overestimates himself and men in general when he says that men have lived contentedly with that truth since creation. The extreme unease Marlow experiences in the Congo and with the Intended is certainly not contentment. Furthermore, his overblown assessment of men directly contradicts the main thrust of the tale: Marlow's tale tells what he learned of civilization and human nature, and it is what he learned in the Congo through pain and suffering that he keeps from the Intended, not something he has been living with contentedly since he was born. Despite these rather substantial errors in judgment that cloud the subject,however, the dramatic presentation of the aunt is exceptionally effective; it

is a vivid account of the effect imperialist propaganda like Kurtz's had on the thinking of the European population.

When Marlow comes to the place in the tale where it would have been appropriate for him to account for the significance of the native woman, however, he makes her out to be nothing more than an embodiment of his vague feelings for the wilderness itself:

> "She came abreast of the steamer, stood still, and faced us. Her long shadow fell to the water's edge. Her face had a tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and of dumb pain mingled with the fear of some struggling, half-shaped resolve. She stood looking at us without a stir, and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose. A whole minute passed, and then she made a step forward. There was a low jingle, a glint of yellow metal, a sway of fringed draperies, and she stopped as if her heart had failed her. The young fellow by my side growled. The pilgrims murmured at my back. She looked at us all as if her life had depended upon the unswerving steadiness of her glance. Suddenly she opened her bared arms and threw them up rigid above her head, as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky, and at the same time the swift shadows darted out on the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer into a shadowy embrace. A formidable silence hung over the scene.
>
> "She turned away slowly, walked on, following the bank, and passed into the bushes on the left. Once only her eyes gleamed back at us in the dusk of the thickets before she disappeared."(136)

Five times in this short passage Marlow denies his capacity to understand what she is doing or why she does it. Her "half-shaped resolve," her "inscrutable purpose" and the three contrary to fact constructions combine to suggest that Marlow cannot show what her actions are, much less what they mean. Other elements in the story indicate that Kurtz was worshipped as a deity and that the natives did not want him taken away. These facts should lead to the inference that the woman is either offering her final homage to the departing deity or cursing those who are spiriting him away, and this kind of inference is completely in keeping with Marlow's overall purpose. But by presenting her the way he does, Marlow offers only a vague feeling

of mystery at the expense of, even in contradiction of, the compelling motive for the tale itself, the urge to understand and judge.

Marlow invokes this vague feeling of mystery in his presentation of the Intended when he notes how the Intended's gesture--"She put out her arms as if after a retreating figure . . ."(160)--reminds him of that of the native woman. Like the native woman, indeed like all the native people at the inner station, the Intended believes in Kurtz and worships him; her "faith" in him is frequently referred to in the closing section of the tale:

> "'But you have heard him! You know!' she cried.
> "'Yes, I know,' I said with something like despair in my heart, but bowing my head before the faith that was in her, before that great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness from which I could not have defended her--from which I could not even defend myself."(159)

Although the concept of the saving lie is an appropriate way of defining further modern man's need to believe in some kind of moral principles, even illusory ones, Conrad's manner of presenting the episode is melodramatic, and Marlow's decision to tell the lie is premature--the result of his earlier specious reasoning about women. These facts, combined with the sense of the Intended's inscrutability, are used to evoke a vague feeling of mystery about her, and provide sufficient evidence that Marlow's presentation of his interview with the Intended is the least satisfactory episode in the tale.

Before he visits the woman, Marlow has no knowledge of her, aside from what he has been able to observe in the portrait of her Kurtz had given him. He knows that she is beautiful, and he notes that "She seemed ready to listen without mental reservation, without suspicion, without a thought for herself"(155). As he prepares to

ring her doorbell and meet her in person, this is the scene in which he finds himself:

> " . . . before the high and ponderous door, between the tall houses of a street as still and decorous as a well-kept alley in a cemetery, I had a vision of him on the stretcher, opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind. He lived then before me; he lived as much as he had ever lived—a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than the shadow of the night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence. The vision seemed to enter the house with me—the stretcher, the phantom-bearers, the wild crowd of obedient worshippers, the gloom of the forests, the glitter of the reach between the murky bends, the beat of the drum, regular and muffled like the beating of a heart—the heart of a conquering darkness. It was a moment of triumph for the wilderness, an invading and vengeful rush which, it seemed to me, I would have to keep back alone for the salvation of another soul."(156)

He then remembers something Kurtz said before he died, that "he wanted no more than justice—no more than justice." The many powerful images in this passage, despite their tendency to evoke the feeling that Kurtz is incomprehensible, are actually an accurate presentation of Kurtz's significance. Kurtz's voracious mouth, gorgeous eloquence, obedient worshippers are all things that are central to Marlow's presentation and judgment of Kurtz. Marlow notes that his vision "was a moment of triumph for the wilderness," and thereby acknowledges his own failure to gain ascendancy—even as the chief accountant did or Kurtz at the last—over the infectious chaos of the jungle. But instead of criticizing his conduct with the Intended, Marlow continues his tale, squeezing out all the melodrama he can from the episode. In the same sentence Marlow remarks of his decision that the Intended must be protected from the knowledge he has of Kurtz and of the wilderness if she is to be saved; but how could Marlow have made this decision, if not on the basis of his earlier, unjustified judgment of women in general? When Marlow describes

his own feelings about the interview with the Intended immediately after telling her the lie she wanted to hear, he explains:

> "It seemed to me that the house would collapse before I could escape, that the heavens would fall upon my head. But nothing happened. The heavens do not fall for such a trifle. Would they have fallen, I wonder, if I had rendered Kurtz that justice which was his due? Hadn't he said he wanted only justice? But I couldn't. I could not tell her. It would have been too dark, too dark altogether. . . ."(162)

This, the closing statement of the tale, fails to justify Marlow's decision. The repetition of "could" and Marlow's reliance on the mere suggestive power of the light-dark imagery, together with the fact of Marlow's simply fading away (as in Lord Jim) instead of closing out the story, indicate that Marlow acted not on an informed judgment, but because of a moral deficiency in himself.

Throughout this final episode, Marlow suggests similarities between the Intended's residence and the trappings of death. The street is "as still and decorous as a well-kept alley in a cemetery"; she is dressed all in black; "the tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness" as if it were a tombstone; her grand piano stands in a corner "with dark gleams on the flat surfaces like a somber and polished sarcophagus"; the city itself is "sepulchral." This sombre atmosphere is reinforced by the room's growing darker while Marlow is there and is used to express the power of the Intended's sorrow and to ratify Marlow's explanation of the lie he attempts to defend by claiming "It would have been too dark . . ." There is no doubt Conrad has created in this closing scene an atmosphere of tremendous power, and yet he uses that power simply for its own sake. His employment of the hollow power of his eloquence here, and in the other places already mentioned, denies the truth of all

he dramatizes so well in the more successful portion of the tale. This final episode constitutes an encouragement, directly from the author, to forget that man can and should achieve moral victories through the exercise of his judgment.

The melodrama of the scene does not require much elaboration. A look at one small segment of the dialogue should suffice:

> "She said suddenly very low, 'He died as he lived.'
> "'His end,' said I, with dull anger stirring in me, 'was in every way worthy of his life.'
> "'And I was not with him,' she murmured. My anger subsided before a feeling of infinite pity."(161)

Marlow's feelings about Kurtz's end and Kurtz's way of life have already been discussed; he reacted to Kurtz's burial as one would to the discarding of a bag of garbage, and although he condemned Kurtz's method of obtaining ivory, he certainly expressed great respect for his final affirmation. "Dull anger" is neither an adequate term to describe any of these feelings not does it sufficiently describe Marlow's immediate reaction to the Intended. Marlow does not dramatize his reaction to her comment; he utters only adjectives. This would not be so bad were it not that there is no motive presented for his anger. Furthermore, the dull anger subsides somehow before a feeling of "infinite pity"; he merely asserts he is angry at Kurtz, but then he says that the anger gives way to the pity he feels for the girl, thereby indicating the possibility that the anger may have been directed at the girl in the first place, not at Kurtz. That a human being, in any case, could experience "infinite pity" is clearly impossible; Conrad's use of this term is an obvious attempt to strain, once more, for mere emotional effects. The emotions Marlow experiences here are unjustified and come across more as an effect of the atmosphere than as genuine human feeling.

Finally, it should be noted how the irony of this final episode operates, and the brief exchange quoted above is a good place to start. This exchange conveys the feeling that Marlow's anger for Kurtz is controlled sufficiently to enable him to utter a statement meaning one thing to him and another to the Intended. She displays a thoroughly romantic belief that Kurtz was a great humanitarian and that his death among the people he served was an appropriate ending to the life he had dedicated to them. Marlow's assertion that his end was worthy of his life she therefore naturally assumes to be in support of her belief. But Marlow certainly has no illusions about Kurtz's humanitarianism, and he cannot mean the statement the way she takes it. How then does he mean it? Since Kurtz's significance for Marlow is as a disembodied voice, surely Kurtz's end is characterized by the last words he spoke, the words that are his moral victory. Yet Kurtz's ultimate assertion of his own humanity is not "worthy" of his life, but an act of mastery over it. The irony employed here is not under sufficient control; Conrad allows the strong feeling in the episode to take control and to employ vague ambiguity for mere effect.

The question of irony comes into play more crucially in the matter of the lie itself. Is it possible that there is irony in Marlow's statement that "'The last word he pronounced was--your name'"? Can it be that this is not a lie at all, that the Intended is, somehow, "The horror"? Marlow acknowledges that he lied to the Intended--"'I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie'"(115); and this statement is not contradicted by Conrad. Therefore, Marlow does not literally mean that he recognized her to be "The horror." The funereal suggestiveness of the Intended's residence in the sepulchral city, however, and her own essential incomprehensibility

certainly allow for the inference that she and her environment are named in Kurtz's dying breath. On the other hand, in this final episode, Marlow admits he has succumbed to the chaos of the wilderness, and he appears not to be in command of himself, either as participant in the tale or as its narrator. Yet, by referring to Kurtz's last words, Marlow cannot help but remind his audience of the fact, so powerfully presented and thoroughly justified, that Kurtz's last words are Kurtz's conquest of the wilderness that had mastered him for so long. The irony that seems so intense in Marlow's lie is therefore not really irony, but a strong feeling of bewilderment, embellished by the power of the highly suggestive atmosphere and reinforced by the author's opting here for hollow emotional effects rather than continuing his struggle to discover truth.

Despite the failings of the episode with the Intended, however, and the numerous instances of adjectival insistence, Heart of Darkness is truly a great tale and one that is central to Conrad. Conrad discovers in this tale that language is the single most important means by which human life becomes civilized and the most effective means civilized people have to maintain and improve the quality of life in their communities. Few ever consider how language enables man to live purposeful, orderly lives or contemplate why one's ability to use language effectively is a clear measure of one's intelligence. Heart of Darkness is not merely an account of a journey into the unconscious, but a dramatization of an intelligent man making sense of a deeply troubling experience. Moreover, the intelligent narrator is not a Nietzschean Ubermensch who simply creates values out of his own ego, but a man whose values are explicitly based on the traditions of his country, his vocation, and his language.

III

Victory:

A Rejection of the Modern

In Axel's Castle, Edmund Wilson adopts the title of Villiers de l'Isle Adam's play for his own book and uses that play to illustrate the prevailing tendency in late nineteenth and early twentieth century literature toward aestheticism.[1] This tendency can best be characterized as the writer's turning into himself, away from the concerns of the community. Such an inward turning, however, is not peculiar to the literature of the period; it is, in fact, basically what distinguishes modern from classical thought. Descartes constructed an entire philosophy on what he considered an axiomatic statement, "Cogito ergo sum," and modern philosophy has proceeded to enlarge on the assumption that private consciousness is the essence of man. In this century there are existentialist philosophers who claim man ought to be freed of his bondage to tradition and society so that he can create his own rules by which to live; there are nihilist philosophers, like Axel Heyst's father, for whom nothing outside the self has value or meaning. For the late nineteenth and early twentieth century literary artist, the turning into self characteristically involves a concentration on pattern as the author's primary means of asserting control over his material. For most modern writers, the compelling motive for writing is not to discover truth but to create in words a world of which the author is the sole and unquestioned master.

There are, of course, writers of the period who do not have such a motive for writing; Conrad and D. H. Lawrence are distinguished by

their opposition to the prevailing tendency of the age. Perhaps Conrad chose the name of Axel Heyst for his protagonist in Victory because he knew Villiers de l'Isle Adam's play and how it typified what was happening on the contemporary scene in literature; but whether it was his intention to allude to this play or simply coincidence matters little. The essential point of Victory is that Conrad's presentation and assessment of Heyst's experiences are a total repudiation of modern egocentricity.

Conrad is very careful about the patterning of his own works of fiction, and this fact is often used as evidence to show him to be something of an aesthete himself. But there is one assumption underlying the modernist position to which Conrad takes particular exception: the belief that the artist is and ought to be isolated from society. Although he does not refer to Conrad in his article on "The Holy Language of Modernism," Denis Donoghue points out, by contrasting T. S. Eliot with D. H. Lawrence, the distinctly opposing attitudes to language that were in conflict during the early decades of this century. He notes that Eliot writes as if words need not be justified by anything outside the work in which they appear, whereas Lawrence means his words to be read and his judgments justified in the context of life. "From Schopenhauer to Eliot, Valery and Beckett," he says,

> much of modern literature has yielded up the idiom of action, committing itself to the idiom of consciousness. . . . [In] Lawrence language is proposed as a wonderfully delicate instrument of perception, as a great means to a greater end. . . . [In his] poems and fiction, language defines and qualifies the writer's sense of life, but it does not preempt experience.[2]

In poems like Eliot's and novels like those of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, language does frequently preempt experience. For

them, words have gained such an ascendancy that they justify themselves; the idiom of consciousness that so interests these modern writers is a universe of words where it is not appropriate to ask what those words or that experience mean. The only kind of inquiry they will allow is the consideration of how skilfully the words and episodes have been arranged. For these writers, art has no purpose except to be art, and language has no civilizing function--as it does have in Heart of Darkness, for example.

James Joyce offers perhaps the best-recognized example of aestheticism in literature: in Ulysses he depicts Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom aimlessly wandering the streets of Dublin. Their paths cross numerous times, but they say little to each other. Nevertheless, by modelling their odysseys through modern Dublin after the Odyssey, Joyce is able to assert quite skillfully that their experiences parallel those of Odysseus and Telemachus and that their relationship is as one of father and son. Joyce's writing is so exhilarating and his exploitation of the possibilities of his chosen pattern so ingenious that the reader is distracted from asking, for example, what Joyce might be saying about modern fatherhood by comparing it with a classical model. Joyce's point, rather, is that he can embody the epic form in modern substance.

Even though none of her works is as immense as Joyce's, Mrs. Woolf clearly demonstrates a similar interest in patterns and consciousness. In To the Lighthouse, her primary purpose is to present the feelings and colors arranging themselves in Lily Briscoe's painting. The reader is not supposed to ask what significance the lighthouse has or whether Miss Briscoe's feeling of closeness to Mr. Ramsay at the end is justified. Mrs. Dalloway has no other

purpose than the presentation of the states of mind of the two central characters, played against one another with the world of post-war London providing the backdrop for their reveries. The work of hers that her husband and others of the Bloomsbury group thought her best work, however, is even more emphatically committed to the idiom of consciousness and the preeminence of pattern than are these two: The Waves depicts no action, unless the beating of the sea upon a shore can be called action. It consists of a rhythmical alternation of the consciousnesses of the six characters and compares this rhythm, in symbolic interludes, to the movement of waves somewhere pounding against a shore. Since the characters share no common world, there is virtually no substance beyond the words themselves for the author to organize into the pattern the work was created to embody; and although Mrs. Woolf uses "said" to designate which of the characters' consciousnesses is being depicted in each passage, she makes clear that this is only a convention: none of them speak to any of the others. The Waves carries with its ethereal pattern the feeling that language has nothing to do with communicating, just as it has nothing to do with articulating meaning or judging.

Victory effectively rejects the prevailing modern tendency. Conrad employs language in this novel, as he does in Heart of Darkness and all his best works, as a means of discovering the meaning of human experience. Rather than denounce society as unworthy of his talents, Conrad uses his artistic ability to reaffirm the kinship of all who share the English language. He makes Heyst a man who wants—as do Joyce and Mrs. Woolf—to keep himself apart from the world, and yet who finds himself drawn inevitably back into it. For Heyst, being alive comes to mean participating in a community of

men. The aesthetic novelist, dedicated to portraying consciousness rather than action, has little interest in plot or judgment, but it is Victory's plot and Conrad's assessment of its significance that embody Conrad's discovery in this novel that communion between people is possible and desirable and that action and language are essential elements of such communion.

Victory, like Heart of Darkness, offers a dramatization and an analysis of a man's moral victory. Unlike that earlier, shorter work, however, the essential judgment on Victory's protagonist is enunciated directly by Conrad, in his title for the tale. Since "victory" is Conrad's assessment of Heyst's life, the appropriate place to begin a criticism of Victory is by considering what kind of victory Heyst can be said to have achieved and whether Conrad's presentation of Heyst's life is a convincing portrait of that victory.

A basic fact of Heyst's life is that he is the son of his father, a philosopher whose fundamental belief is that although life is an amusing spectacle, one can gain nothing by actively participating in it. Heyst isolates himself from humanity because he takes quite seriously what his father taught him about life. He fully embraces the advice his dying father gave him when he asked, since life is so pointless, what he ought to do with himself; his father's reply was "Look on—make no sound." Although Heyst adopts the stance toward reality taught him by his father, there is too much life in Heyst to enable him to follow the advice completely. Heyst spontaneously and against his own will engages himself in human affairs on two separate occasions: once when he responds to Morrison's need for money to save his ship from confiscation and again when he rescues Lena from

the vicious Zangiacomos. Conrad presents Heyst's struggle with his opposing allegiances to life and nihilism as essential to the plot, but perhaps nowhere is the struggle so concisely delineated as at the beginning of part III where he shows Heyst alone on Samburan, reflecting on his own life after the T. B. C. Company has collapsed:

> A meditation is always—in a white man, at least—more or less an interrogative exercise. Heyst meditated in simple terms on the mystery of his actions; and he answered himself with the honest reflection:
>
> "There must be a lot of the original Adam in me, after all."
>
> He reflected, too, with the sense of making a discovery, that this primeval ancestor is not easily suppressed. The oldest voice in the world is just the one that never ceases to speak. If anybody could have silenced its imperative echoes, it should have been Heyst's father, with his contemptuous, inflexible negation of all effort; but apparently he could not. There was in the son a lot of that first ancestor who, as soon as he could uplift his muddy frame from the celestial mould, started inspecting and naming the animals of that paradise which he was so soon to lose.
>
> Action—the first thought, or perhaps the first impulse, on earth! The barbed hook, baited with the illusion of progress, to bring out of the lightless void the shoals of unnumbered generations!
>
> "And I, the son of my father, have been caught too, like the silliest fish of them all," Heyst said to himself.(173-74)

It is significant that Conrad presents the teachings of the elder Heyst as an attempt to silence a voice and that the impulse the philosopher could not stifle in his son is his impulse not only to act, but to name. This powerful account of Heyst's struggle is a masterful analysis of what it is that makes Heyst human, and the reliance on the figure of Adam is central to the presentation. Heyst demonstrates later how much he resembles Adam when he gives Lena her name, and they begin to think of themselves as Adam and Eve in an island paradise. The victory Heyst achieves in life is a victory over the "contemptuous, inflexible negation of all effort" that characterizes his father's philosophy; in spite of the elder Heyst's attempt to deny the original Adam in Heyst, it will not be suppressed. Heyst

finds himself, against his own will, involving himself with Morrison and then with Lena. But Conrad does not allow Victory's consideration of the issue to end here, celebrating a victory of impulse over reason: it would be a shallow victory indeed if a man as intelligent as Heyst were to live his entire life without resolving his struggle with these two opposing allegiances. Heyst's ultimate acknowledgement that his allegiance to his father must be abandoned justifies his impulsive behavior and makes clear that his story does not celebrate the infallibility of impulse, but is, rather, a complete moral victory over his father's nihilism. Heyst, at the novel's end, denounces the evil of his father's teachings and deliberately acts to oppose that evil.

Heyst's struggle to discover, finally, how he ought to live is intense, and Conrad's dramatization of that struggle encompasses every aspect of Heyst's life. Conrad's description of Heyst's feelings toward the property left him by his father is a striking analysis of the evil influence his upbringing has had on him. After telling how the young Heyst begins his travels in an attempt to live as his father taught him, Conrad brings up the subject of Heyst's inheritance:

> The elder Heyst had left behind him a little money and a certain quantity of movable objects, such as books, tables, chairs, and pictures, which might have complained of heartless desertion after many years of faithful service; for there is a soul in things. Heyst, our Heyst, had often thought of them, reproachful and mute, shrouded and locked up in those rooms, far away in London with the sounds of the street reaching them faintly, and sometimes a little sunshine, when the blinds were pulled up and the windows opened from time to time in pursuance of his original instructions and later reminders. It seemed as if in his conception of a world not worth touching, and perhaps not substantial enough to grasp, these objects familiar to his childhood and his youth and associated with the memory of an old man, were the only realities, something having an absolute existence. He would never have them sold, or even moved from the places they occupied

> when he looked upon them last. When he was advised from London that his lease had expired, and that the house, with some others like it as two peas, was to be demolished, he was surprisingly distressed.
>
> He had entered by then the broad, human path of inconsistencies. Already the Tropical Belt Coal Company was in existence. He sent instructions to have some of the things sent out to him at Samburan, just as any ordinary, credulous person would have done. They came, torn out from their long repose—a lot of books, some chairs and tables, his father's portrait in oils, which surprised Heyst by its air of youth, because he remembered his father as a much older man; a lot of small objects, such as candlesticks, inkstands, and statuettes from his father's study, which surprised him because they looked so old and so much worn.
>
> The manager of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, unpacking them on the verandah in the shade besieged by a fierce sunshine, must have felt like a remorseful apostate before these relics.(176-77)

Heyst's attitude toward these objects owned and used by his father is characterized by compassion; these things are appropriately animated so that they appear worthy recipients of the care Heyst orders to be given them. Heyst has the blinds raised and the windows opened, just as he ought to have done if these objects had been an invalid entrusted to his care who would do better with a bit of fresh air and sunshine. The mention of the Tropical Belt Coal Company juxtaposes Heyst's involvement with Morrison and his father's philosophy and focuses attention on Heyst's struggle with his two allegiances. He is distressed by the news of the house's immiment demolition because he knows now he can no longer keep his father's philosophy tucked away safely at arm's length; he must accept these possessions into his own life and come to terms with the philosophy they represent. Once the objects present themselves to him on Samburan, he has immediate access to all of his father's reasons for avoiding contact with humanity; but the very visit to Sourabaya that he makes to to obtain these objects is the visit during which he meets Lena, and, ironically, he takes home, as well as these objects, the force, in the person of Lena,

that will help him subdue the evil that has influenced his life for so long.

In the end, Heyst realizes that his father's writings, not the human world, must be sacrificed. When he enters the room where Lena sits mortally wounded, he finally knows that the reality to which he must commit himself is personified by Lena herself and that his father's world must be denied. Conrad effectively portrays this turnabout in Heyst's way of thinking by showing that the books and the portrait Heyst had believed to be the only substantial things in the world now appear to him unreal and that Lena and her world have become, at the hour of her death, all too painfully real:

> All the objects in there—the books, the gleam of old silver familiar to him from boyhood, the very portrait on the wall—seemed shadowy, insubstantial, the dumb accomplices of an amazing dream-plot ending in an illusory effect of awakening and the impossibility of ever closing his eyes again. With dread he forced himself to look at the girl. Still in the chair, she was leaning forward far over her knees and had hidden her face in her hands. (403)

Lena, he realizes, has sacrificed her life for him, thereby demonstrating her love for him and her total commitment to the human world Heyst has tried so hard to reject. Heyst takes her in his arms and embraces her as she dies, thereby partaking in her demonstration of love and her victory over death.

Heyst's entire relationship with Lena is developed dramatically in the context of his struggle to discover the evil of his father's teachings. Conrad demonstrates how great an impediment Heyst's loyalty to his father's philosophy is to their love in passages like the one below, where he presents Heyst's and Lena's conversation as they return from their unsuccessful quest for aid from Wang and the Alfuros:

"I gave up pleading with Wang. Here we are, repulsed! Not only without power to resist the evil, but unable to make terms for ourselves with the worthy envoys, the envoys extraordinary of the world we thought we had done with for years and years. And that's bad, Lena, very bad."

"It's funny," she said thoughtfully. "Bad? I suppose it is. I don't know that it is. But do you? Do you? You talk as if you didn't believe in it."

She gazed at him earnestly.

"Do I? Ah! That's it. I don't know how to talk. I have managed to refine everything away. I've said to the Earth that bore me: 'I am I and you are a shadow.' And, by Jove, it is so! But it appears that such words cannot be uttered with impunity. Here I am on a Shadow inhabited by Shades. How helpless a man is against Shades! How is one to intimidate, persuade, resist, assert oneself against them? I have lost all belief in realities. . . . Lena, give me your hand."

She looked at him surprised, uncomprehending.

"Your hand," he cried.

She obeyed; he seized it with avidity as if eager to raise it to his lips, but halfway up released his grasp. They looked at each other for a time.

"What's the matter, dear?" she whispered timidly.

"Neither force nor conviction," Heyst muttered wearily to himself. "How am I to meet this charmingly simple problem?"(349-50)

His inability to take reality seriously, Heyst recognizes, has hampered his ability both to speak and to act. His longstanding credo that "I am I and you are a shadow" has affected everything he thinks or does, and at this point in his life it becomes a very real barrier to his defending himself against the deadly threat posed by Mr. Jones and his two accomplices. He has become so accustomed to considering the world irrelevant to him that in this time of danger he does not respond. His impulsive request for Lena's hand indicates he is still very much alive and struggling hard against the doctrines with which his life has long been burdened, but his failure even to kiss her hand dramatically asserts that the "charmingly simple problem" confronting Heyst involves not only how to defend against Jones but also how to love Lena. That Conrad blends so effectively and dramatically the two aspects of Heyst's predicament is truly a work of genius.

The beginning of their love was commonplace enough: he feels sorry for her, asks her to sit at his table and talk, and becomes particularly fascinated with the sound of her voice. There is, it seems, something of the original Eve in her to which he is attracted. Heyst, however, avoids meditating or articulating his feeling for Lena; aside from his naming her—a process portrayed more as an exercise in randomly juggling syllables than an attempt to describe her appropriately—Heyst's responses to her show he does not want to discover what it is about her he finds so attractive. When he falls in love with her, Heyst does not reflect on what is happening; he spontaneously makes himself her protector once he realizes she is being tortured by the Zangiacomos. But later, when he is alone with her on Samburan, he attempts to deny his emotional ties to her and finds solace in the life of passive solitude prescribed by his father's writings. Lena, however, will not allow him to deny his love for her, for she is as desperate for love as he is for isolation. Conrad dramatizes this conflict in the scene where, after having climbed the ridge on Samburan, Heyst and Lena meditate silently in the bungalow, she lying down and he reading the last words his father wrote. Lena interrupts the silence:

> "You sit there as if you were unhappy."
> "I thought you were asleep," he said.
> "I was lying down, right enough, but I never closed my eyes."
> "The rest would have done you good after our walk. Didn't you try?"
> "I was lying down, I tell you, but sleep I couldn't."
> "And you made no sound! What want of sincerity! Or did you want to be alone for a time?"
> "I—alone!" she murmured.(220)

The note of surprise in Lena's answer to that last question makes it clear that solitude is the last thing she wants; solitude, though, is very much on Heyst's mind, for he has been reading his father's philosophy. The echo of the advice, "Look on—make no sound," is

Heyst's attempt to interpret Lena's silence according to his father's philosophy, but Lena's response shows how inaccurate that interpretation is.

The conversation continues with Heyst trying to maintain his distance from her; he expresses his concern for her health and apologizes for the exhausting climb they had taken earlier in the day. But the subject of his love for her is not to be avoided for long:

> "You should try to love me!" she said.
> He made a movement of astonishment.
> "Try!" he muttered. "But it seems to me—" He broke off, saying to himself that if he loved her, he had never told her so in so many words. Simple words! They died on his lips.
> "What makes you say that?" he asked.
> She lowered her eyelids and turned her head a little.
> "I have done nothing," she said in a low voice. "It's you who have been good, helpful and tender to me. Perhaps you love me for that—just for that; or perhaps you love me for company, and because—well! But it seems to me that you can never love me for myself, only for myself, as people do love each other when it is to be for ever." Her head dropped. "For ever," she breathed out again; then, still more faintly, she added an entreating: "Do try!"
> These last words went straight to his heart—the sound of them more than the sense. He did not know what to say, either from want of practice in dealing with women or simply from his innate honesty of thought. All his defences were broken now. Life had him fairly by the throat. But he managed a smile, though she was not looking at him; yes, he did manage it—the well-known Heyst smile of playful courtesy, so familiar to all sorts and conditions of men in the islands.
> "My dear Lena," he said, "it looks as if you were trying to pick a very unnecessary quarrel with me—of all people!"(220-21)

Not only can Heyst not tell Lena he loves her, but he cannot even admit to himself that love is the right word to describe how he feels about her. The impassioned entreaty Lena makes to secure his love only succeeds in cornering him and making him aware of how involved he has become in the human affairs he has so long taken pains to eschew. Since he is still unable to admit the extent of his emotional bond to Lena, he disguises himself with a smile, the same smile he employed on Morrison's behalf to convince others of his commitment to the region's

economic advancement. The brusque shift in Heyst's tone at the end of the conversation is a stroke of genius: it shows decisively how inhuman Heyst must force himself to be if he is to cling to his father's nihilism.

The passage derives some of its effectiveness from the account Conrad presents of Heyst reading from his father's writings before he realizes Lena has not fallen asleep. An epigram from those writings is quoted immediately before the conversation above and is directly to the point: "'Of the stratagems of life the most cruel,'" writes the elder Heyst, "'is the consolation of love—the most subtle too'"(219). Heyst is driven back to his father's nihilism because he has just been made painfully aware of the evil that lurks in the world of human action: Lena has told him of the vicious lies Schomberg has been circulating. After he sends Lena to bed, Heyst reflects on the significance of the evil voice of that innkeeper reaching out from the world to touch him:

> A great silence brooded over Samburan—the silence of the great heat that seems pregnant with fatal issues, like the silence of ardent thought. Heyst remained alone in the big room. The girl seeing him take up a book, had retreated to her chamber. Heyst sat down under his father's portrait; and the abominable calumny crept back into his recollection. The taste of it came on his lips, nauseating and corrosive like some kinds of poison. He was tempted to spit on the floor, naively, in sheer unsophisticated disgust of the physical sensation. He shook his head, surprised at himself. He was not used to receive his intellectual impressions in that way—reflected in moments of carnal emotion. He stirred impatiently in his chair, and raised the book to his eyes with both hands. It was one of his father's. He opened it haphazard, and his eyes fell on the middle of the page. The elder Heyst had written of everything in many books—of space and of time, of animals and of stars; analysing ideas and actions, the laughter and the frowns of men, and the grimaces of their agony. The son read, shrinking into himself, composing his face as if under the author's eye, with a vivid consciousness of the portrait on his right hand, a little above his head; a wonderful presence in its heavy frame on the flimsy wall of mats, looking exiled at home, out of place and masterful, in the painted immobility of profile.

> . . . It seemed to him that he was hearing his father's voice, speaking and ceasing to speak again. Startled at first, he ended by finding a charm in the illusion. He abandoned himself to the half-belief that something of his father dwelt yet on the earth—a ghostly voice, audible to the ear of his own flesh and blood.(218-19)

Conrad sets the charm of Heyst's father's voice against the charm of Lena's and shows that the warning Heyst's father offers him on the matter of human love is a particularly appropriate reminder to Heyst of the longstanding allegiance he bears to his father and to his doctrine that "this world, for the wise, is nothing but an amusing spectacle"(178). Heyst is depicted here recoiling from the villainy of the world and finding consolation in the nihilism of his father's writings; however, the distinctly physical nature of that recoil illustrates that Heyst has some of the original Adam in him, whether he likes it or not. He feels disgust at the physical sensation because in trying to live by his father's advice, he has attempted not only to isolate himself from humanity, but to divorce his own mind from his body. Conrad's realization of the extent of Heyst's divorce from human nature helps to explain why the feelings of physical intimacy he experiences when talking to Lena a little later are especially disconcerting; when she begs him to love her, she asks him to commit himself to her, body and soul. Heyst, however, feels the presence of his father very acutely, and Conrad's portrayal of Heyst's feelings in this scene offers an especially incisive analysis of how it is that the elder Heyst's doctrines are so attractive to him and love so difficult.

The account Conrad presents of Heyst's frustrating the possibilities of his love for Lena offers an almost Lawrentian solution to human absurdity, the subject on which Heyst's father dwelt for so long.

The writing in the two above passages is among Conrad's best; in fact, Conrad's presentation of the private conversations of Heyst and Lena and of their thoughts about each other generally is a highlight of the novel. Conrad endows his presentation of their relationship with a special power because he understands so well the basic tensions in all they do and think underlying the love between them. The imposing figure of the elder Heyst interfering in their relationship is present even to the end when Heyst finally rejects nihilism and embraces life. Once Lena begs Heyst to love her, "Life," Conrad notes, "had him fairly by the throat." A smile and an abrupt change of tone are not enough to extricate Heyst from his predicament; no sooner does the conversation end than the agents of Schomberg's villainy arrive to challenge this marooned intellectual with very real threats to his life and Lena's.

Heyst has means with which to defend himself and Lena, but he lacks the ability to take the decisive action at the right time; he rationalizes his situation to the point where he finds himself unable to act. Heyst's vacuous, intellectual background has prevented him from developing that knack of responding creatively that is exercised by men when they are most alive. There is sufficient impulsiveness in Heyst to entangle him in human affairs, even in opposition to his determined will to follow his father's philosophy, but not enough to permit him to learn how to act. Conrad's analysis of Heyst in his "Author's Note" to the 1920 edition speaks to this point eloquently:

> Heyst in his fine detachment had lost the habit of asserting himself. I don't mean the courage of self-assertion, either moral or physical, but the mere way of it, the trick of the thing, the readiness of mind and the turn of the hand that come without reflection and lead man to excellence in life, in art, in crime, in virtue, and for the matter of that,

> even in love. Thinking is the great enemy of perfection. The habit of profound reflection, I am compelled to say, is the most pernicious of all the habits formed by the civilized man.(x-xi)

To speak of excellence in crime seems eccentric when considering Victory: how could anyone conceive of Jones or Ricardo achieving excellence? But Conrad means to imply no such possibility. The Conradian character who best exemplifies "the readiness of mind and the turn of the hand that come without reflection and lead the man to excellence in life" is Captain MacWhirr: he asserts his authority and exercises his wisdom without having to think about what he does. That MacWhirr is not given to reflection is his great virtue; his lack of imagination enables him to confront the typhoon, to restore order among the coolies, and to divide the coolies' property, all without having to imagine before hand, as Jukes does, the possible, but as yet unreal, dangers lying ahead. If Heyst had been able to develop the habit of acting correctly instead of spending so much of his time in profound reflection, he, too, could have achieved excellence before Lena is mortally wounded. Heyst is impulsive and intelligent, but the essential division of his body from his mind prevents him from developing the knack of intelligent impulse.

When he is informed of the lies spread about the islands claiming he murdered Morrison, Heyst laments: "To slay, to love— the greatest enterprises of life upon a man! And I have no experience of either"(212). Heyst realizes that his impulsive involvements with Morrison and Lena are setting him up for the two greatest tests of his reluctant but irrepressible commitment to life; he is forced now either to express his love by killing Jones and his followers or to be bereft of both love and life. Lena, on the other hand, does have the knack required to defend them; she demonstrates this in her first

encounter with Ricardo when she wrestles with him and again when she obtains his knife. Their differing temperaments are effectively contrasted in the conversation they have after discovering the revolver is gone, and the only weapon left them is a crowbar they cannot find:

> "But what about that crowbar? Suppose I had it! Could I stand in ambush at the side of the door—this door—and smash the first protruding head, scatter blood and brains over the floor, over these walls, and then run stealthily to the other door to do the same thing—and repeat the performance for a third time, perhaps? Could I? On suspicion, without compunction, with a calm and determined purpose? No, it is not in me. I date too late. Would you like to see me attempt this thing while that mysterious prestige of mine lasts—or their not less mysterious hesitation?"
>
> "No, no!" she whispered ardently, as if compelled to speak by his eyes fixed on her face. "No, it's a knife you want to defend yourself with—to defend—there will be time—"
>
> "And who knows if it isn't really my duty?" he began again, as if he had not heard her disjointed words at all. "It may be—my duty to you, to myself. For why should I put up with the humiliation of their secret menaces? Do you know what the world would say?"
>
> He emitted a low laugh, which struck her with terror. She would have got up, but he stooped so low over her that she could not move without first pushing him away.
>
> "It would say, Lena, that I—that Swede—after luring my friend and partner to his death from mere greed of money, have murdered those unoffending shipwrecked strangers from sheer funk. That would be the story whispered—perhaps shouted—certainly spread out, and believed—and <u>believed</u>, my dear Lena!"
>
> "Who would believe such awful things?"
>
> "Perhaps you wouldn't—not at first, at any rate; but the power of calumny grows with time. It's insidious and penetrating. It can even destroy one's faith in oneself—dry-rot the soul."(361-62)

Whereas Heyst imagines the gory consequences of the act he contemplates and thereby convinces himself he cannot do it, Lena considers what practical steps she can take in their defense, and then proceeds to take those steps, even against Heyst's explicit instructions. Heyst is so enthralled by his own imagination that he totally ignores what Lena suggests about the knife. Given Heyst's failure to act in a crisis,

the knife would have done him no more good than a revolver or a crowbar. The incident, however, does show why Lena can act even though Heyst cannot. Her world has always been a world of human relationships with their attendant pain and activity, from the pinches of the Zangiacomos to her belief that she could, by seizing Ricardo's weapon, defend them against death. Lena's world is intensely physical. The detailed description Heyst offers of the grisly scene he would cause if he were to use the crowbar in their defence disgusts Heyst, but renders Lena even more resolved to defend against the intruders, regardless of the cost. Heyst continues rationalizing his inaction by insisting that he does not want to give the island gossips another opportunity to spread lies about him, but Lena's question, "Who would believe such awful things?", points out that although any number of strangers might believe the report Heyst imagines would be circulated about himself, she would not and neither should he. Heyst, however, is so used to rationalizing and so rarely involved in action or in love that he cannot accept that her understanding of his actions and his own belief in the correctness of those actions would be all that mattered; all, that is, but the "charmingly simple problem" of reacting to the threat to their lives posed by Jones and his men.

All three members of the Jones gang are one-dimensional, like characters in a fairy-tale. That aura of unreality about them is a function of Heyst's lifelong practice of considering the world to be a shadow, and Conrad presents them substantially from Heyst's point of view. Heyst's analysis of their significance is crisp and spontaneous; he views Jones, Ricardo, and Pedro as the embodiment of abstract principles:

> "Do you see them?" Heyst whispered into the girl's ear. "Here they are before you--evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, arm in arm. The brute force is at the back. A trio of fitting envoys perhaps--but what welcome? Suppose I were armed, could I shoot those two down where they stand? Could I?"
>
> Without moving her head, the girl felt for Heyst's hand, pressed it, and thereafter did not let it go. He continued, bitterly playful:
>
> "I don't know. I don't think so. There is a strain in me which lays me under an insensate obligation to avoid even the appearance of murder. I have never pulled a trigger or lifted my hand on a man, even in self-defence."(329)

The irony is that although Heyst has tried to avoid entanglements in human affairs, it is precisely the appearance of murder, namely his alleged murder of Morrison, that has impressed Jones into believing that in Heyst he has found an adversary worthy of him. Heyst's appraisal of the three as evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, and brute force and his realization that they are fitting invaders of Heyst's and Lena's privacy are perhaps more accurate than Heyst himself can know; the three men are the appropriate antithesis of Heyst's own intelligence, restraint, and powerlessness. Jones, however, is not merely evil intelligence: he is, like Gentleman Brown of Lord Jim, the antithesis of gentlemanliness. He is like Heyst in that he believes things ought to be done the right way, but he is most unlike Heyst in that he harbors this belief simply as a way of making the spectacle of life more entertaining, not because of any moral principle. Jones is a fitting antithesis of Heyst because he is intelligent, and because that intelligence is devoted to evil; and he is a most fitting envoy of the world Heyst left behind and a most dangerous adversary because he is assisted by an instinct for violence and a brute power to execute his evil designs.

The evil principles enacted by Jones and his gang are perhaps best characterized in the scene in Schomberg's hotel when Jones and

Ricardo are talking to the innkeeper. Schomberg is very upset, having just heard that his two guests plan to stay with him for another month. They then inform him, casually but convincingly, that if Schomberg should try to throw them out, they would not care in the least if he happened to get "hurt" and his establishment burnt down in the attempt. Schomberg, to deflect the conversation from this painful subject, wonders aloud why they should want to stay in his hotel so long, since there is very little cash to be won at his gambling tables:

> Schomberg's argument was met by Mr. Jones's statement that one must do something to kill time. Killing was not forbidden. For the rest, being in a communicative mood, Mr. Jones said languidly and in a voice indifferent, as if issuing from a tomb, that he depended on himself, as if the world were still one great, wild jungle without law. Martin was something like that, too—for reasons of his own.(113)

Conrad's judgment of Jones's anarchic principles need hardly be elaborated; that Jones is an all but insubstantial corpse befits his function as the antithesis of Heyst and is an effective assertion that the indifference to life that is central to Jones's conduct is nothing other than death itself. Jones lives by an unexpressed, whimsical, private moral code that is totally incompatible with the laws and customs of society; he is obsessed with his concern that things be done properly, but that concern is without rational foundation, arising simply out of an urge to parody the true gentleman's concerns for honor and decorum. This latter point is suggested in Ricardo's conversation with Schomberg where he relates the talk he and Jones had after robbing the yacht on which Ricardo had been serving:

> "'Do you want me to understand, sir, that you mind there being one life more or less on this earth?' I asked him, a few hours after we got away.
> "'Certainly not,' says he.
> "'Well, then, why did you stop me?'
> "'There's a proper way of doing things. You'll have to learn to be correct. There's also unnecessary exertion.

> That must be avoided, too—if only for the look of the thing.' A gentleman's way of putting things to you,—and no mistake!"(137)

The concept of the "wild jungle without law" aptly characterizes the common world Jones and Ricardo share. But where Jones takes care to avoid unnecessary exertion, Ricardo is hard pressed to restrain his "feral" instinct. Ricardo, like MacWhirr and Leggatt and many other Conradian characters, was a seaman; he was, he tells Schomberg, "bred to the sea from a boy, you know"(125). Ricardo, however, is an apostate seaman. When he joins forces with Jones, he renounces every responsibility life at sea ever taught him, abandons his position as mate of the yacht, and even assists in the theft of the captain's cash box. Jones's indifference to life and to the sanctions of society offers Ricardo the opportunity to remove the restrictions sea life had placed on his instinctive savagery, but, as Ricardo discovers on Samburan, Jones's whimsical desire that Heyst be plundered properly requires Ricardo to suppress his natural inclination for pouncing and ripping up. In his "Author's Note" Conrad outlines the personal contacts he had with the original Ricardo: "His eyes were green and every cat I see to this day reminds me of the exact contour of his face"(xiii). How like that original he turns out to be in the other aspects of his character is irrelevant, but how appropriate the concept of Ricardo's felinity is to the function he serves as one of Heyst's adversaries is significant and unmistakable. Conrad's choosing to depict Ricardo as a cat sometimes leads him to overwork the image, but occasionally, as in the following passage, that same decision enables him to dramatize powerfully the dynamics of restraint. Ricardo, very much aware of the restraint Jones is demanding so Heyst's riches can be located before they kill him, is prowling around the bungalow as

Wang prepares to serve breakfast:

> Another moment, just for a glance towards the Jones bungalow, whence he expected Heyst to issue on his way to that breakfast so offensively decorated, and Ricardo began his retreat. His impulse, his desire, was for a rush into the open, face to face with the appointed victim, for what he called a "ripping up," visualised greedily, and always with the swift preliminary stooping movement on his part—the forerunner of certain death to his adversary. This was his impulse; and as it was, so to speak, constitutional, it was extremely difficult to resist when his blood was up. What could be more trying than to have to skulk and dodge and restrain oneself, mentally and physically, when one's blood was up? . . . A short scramble of some twenty feet brought him up again to the upper level, at the place where the jetty had its roots in the shore. He leaned his back against one of the lofty uprights which still held up the company's sign-board above the mound of derelict coal. Nobody could have guessed how much his blood was up. To contain himself he folded his arms tightly on his breast.
>
> Ricardo was not used to a prolonged effort of self-control. His craft, his artfulness, felt themselves always at the mercy of his nature, which was truly feral and only held in subjection by the influence of the "governor," the prestige of a gentleman. It had its cunning too, but it was being almost too severely tried since the feral solution of a growl and a spring was forbidden by the problem.(283-84)

The presentation of Ricardo tightly folding his arms on his breast in an attempt to exert greater control over his feral instinct is particularly effective. The total conception of Ricardo owes its effectiveness to Conrad's understanding the consequences of letting one's impulses run free: Conrad's portraying Ricardo as a cat—not a domesticated cat, but a beast of the jungle—is his way of expressing his judgment on those who imagine, with Voltaire, that man is good and gentle by nature. More than that, it comes as a comment on how to view the correct impulses that lead Heyst to embrace life and humankind, and it appears, most powerfully, in this ironic context where indifference, by sheer whim, exerts control over impulse. The worship of impulse, Conrad suggests, is glorified bestiality; impulses are to be understood and educated, but not to be trusted. The contrast Ricardo

provides, furthermore, shows that although impulsiveness twice leads Heyst into involvement with the affairs of the world, the rightness of those acts is not guaranteed by their impulsiveness: Heyst's impulses are the instruments, not the substance, of his victory.

As already indicated, there are reasons arising directly from Heyst's own character and predicament that justify the intrusion of the Jones trio into Heyst's and Lena's lives on Samburan and render these three fitting as envoys of the outside world Heyst thought he was rid of for ever. The denouement precipitated by their intrusion centres on Lena's presence and is the inevitable result of the opposing attitudes of Jones, Ricardo, and Heyst toward the essential bond with humanity found in the love of a man and a woman. Ricardo's attraction to Lena is appropriate to his instinctive savagery: he pounces on her because the sight of this woman is so strong a stimulus to his savage lust that it can no longer be controlled. His lust is so powerful it leads him to forsake his allegiance to Jones and to offer himself to be Lena's mate. Jones, however, is a confirmed misogynist who cannot stand even the sight of a woman; he despises society, tradition, and law, and it is therefore appropriate that he should despise women for the way they lure men into bondage. Jones's immediate response to the news that there is a woman on the island is to call a truce with Heyst and to proceed with him against Ricardo, whom he no longer trusts. His first shot at Ricardo only grazes his head, but, significantly, it enters Lena's body and mortally wounds her. In the moment of her greatest triumph, Lena is killed by Jones's bullet—Conrad's way of asserting that Lena's love for Heyst is the kind of bond Jones despises most about life.

After being laid on the bed, Lena asks to hold the symbol of her

victory over death so she can offer it to Heyst as the fullest possible expression of her love. She learns she has been shot and is mortally wounded, but she is convinced she has vanquished death:

> "No more," she muttered. "There will be no more [death]! Oh, my beloved," she cried weakly, "I've saved you! Why don't you take me into your arms and carry me out of this lonely place?"(406)

Although it might seem pathetically ironic that Lena emphatically asserts her victory over death at the moment of her own dying, Conrad fully supports her claim of victory. Lena has conquered death not by ensuring that neither she nor her beloved will die, but by affirming her total commitment to life through her demonstration of love for Heyst. Her last request, for Heyst to take her away from "this lonely place," asserts more precisely that that commitment to life necessarily involves an engagement in a community: to live in isolation, as Heyst tried to do for so long, is death. Her assertion of victory over death is not undermined by her uttering of it at the moment of her own death; rather, this timing ironically and unequivocally affirms her victory. No man can hope to ensure he will never die, and Lena's assertion of victory is not the result of such a false hope; her victory is a moral victory over the forces of evil, represented by Heyst's father and by Jones and his gang, that would deny the value of living in collaboration with other men.

Heyst fully appreciates the significance of Lena's achievement, but the habits of a lifetime are not immediately broken, even by a moment of grief as intense as Heyst's while he watches Lena dying. Here is how he responds to Lena's last request:

> Heyst bent low over her, cursing his fastidious soul, which even at that moment kept the true cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of all life. He dared not touch her, and she had no longer the strength to throw her arms about his neck.(406)

The difficulty of casting off the evil influence of a nihilistic upbringing even with the help of instincts as powerful as Heyst's is presented here with a sure, delicate touch. The habits of a lifetime prevent his asserting verbally the love he feels for Lena, but even these are insufficient to suppress his mental acknowledgement of that love or to stop him from embracing her and partaking in her love and her victory as she dies:

> She tried to raise herself, but all she could do was to lift her head a little from the pillow. With a terrified and gentle movement, Heyst hastened to slip his arm under her neck. She felt relieved at once of an intolerable weight, and was content to surrender to him the infinite weariness of her tremendous achievement.(406-07)

Heyst's attitude toward the damage done him by his father's teachings is poignantly expressed in his inward cursing of the habits those teachings fostered in him. It is to Heyst's glory that he is able to denounce the evil thrust upon him by his own father and to partake, instead, of Lena's victory, which he does now, and which he professes to be doing when he offers himself to the flames to be consumed along with her lifeless body. The simple act of slipping his arm under her neck is Heyst's telling her he loves her, and by so doing Lena's victory becomes his victory, too.

The irony attendant upon Lena's death operates in the presentation of Heyst's death, but in the latter case, Conrad's touch is not so sure. Like Lena, Heyst asserts his commitment to life only shortly before his death; he dies to purge himself of the nihilism taught him by his father and to assert his ultimate commitment in love to Lena. His death, however, is by his own hand and does not issue inevitably from the unfolding of events and the developing of the theme, as Lena's does. Although Davidson's comments on Heyst's self-immolation as a purgation by fire fit the theme and explain

Heyst's action, they cannot justify it. Heyst's suicide, even though it does assert his commitment to Lena and dramatizes his purgation of his father's evil influence, reeks of despair. The irony that renders Lena's death and victory so poignant and so effective serves in Heyst's case to undermine the development of the main theme, for it implies that Heyst could best rid himself of his father's influence and prove his love for Lena by taking his own life. Conrad ends the novel with suicide possibly because of his penchant for the theatrical or because of his desire for aesthetic completion: he wants to show Heyst express his love for Lena in terms similar to those in which she expresses her love for him. Whatever the intention, Heyst's suicide is a mistake. When Heyst exclaims, after Lena's death:

> "'Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love—and to put its trust in life.'"(410)

he acknowledges that his father's evil teachings have brought him much pain and suffering and that he ought to put his trust in life; but his suicide indicates he is too old to learn how. This is apparently why he takes his own life, but it contradicts all that Lena stands for, and it repudiates the vow to become involved in life taken by Heyst in his mute expression of his love for Lena and his recognition of her victory. Rather than being an affirmation of love and life, suicide is precisely the opposite.

The true victory achieved by Heyst and Lena, however, is unequivocal and on the side of life. Conrad's comment that the elder Heyst nurtured in his son an "infernal mistrust of all life"(406) expresses accurately Conrad's assessment of the evil inherent in that man's philosophy, and his dramatization of Lena's and Heyst's victory over that evil on behalf of life convincingly and effectively justifies

Conrad's calling it "infernal." There are critics of Victory, however, who claim, with John Saveson, that "The title of the novel is ironic. No one gains a victory,"[3] and they are doubtless the same ones who would deny Marlow when he says in Heart of Darkness that Kurtz's last words are a moral victory. There are critics like Robert Secor, who claim that Conrad deliberately shifts the novel's point of view several times to dramatize the inadequacy of each narrative perspective and to assert that there is no common world shared by any of the novel's characters.[4] Conrad acknowledges that the novel's main characters do not, for the most part, share a common world, but the comment he offers so effectively is that they are struggling to commit themselves to that common world and that once they have made that commitment, their victory is complete.' Perhaps the critics mentioned above misread Victory because their thinking has been so thoroughly influenced by the modern drift toward the glorification of the individual mind and the withdrawal from communal life that they cannot see or will not acknowledge that what Conrad discovers in this novel repudiates the the position they hold themselves. Whatever the reason, Conrad's commitment to life lived in collaboration with other men is total, and Victory justifies that commitment.

IV

The Triumph of MacWhirr's Limited Imagination

Although *Victory* is the novel where Conrad most directly repudiates those who would deny the importance of the community in human life, every one of his works in some way asserts that human life essentially is life lived by men in collaboration. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad dramatically affirms the importance of language as the instrument of judgment, and he shows how valuable is the relationship established between men by the bond of common activity, the most outstanding example of which is Marlow's relationship with his helmsman. Furthermore, Marlow is shown telling his tale to a cross-section of men from the world at large and seeking their corroboration of his judgments. In "The Secret Sharer" the actions of the young captain and Leggatt are dangerous to the community, and Conrad's portrait of the protagonist's keeping Leggatt's presence secret and of the dangerous disruptions their rapport causes in the life of the ship illustrates how essential it is that men cooperate to maintain their common world.

In the two tales to be taken up next, Conrad's experience in the British Merchant Service provides the basis for his dramatization of the conduct of successful communities. In *Typhoon* and *The Shadow-Line* Conrad shows that, if a leader is to keep a community functioning well, he must have firm control over his imagination. Conrad depicts in each of these tales a captain coping with an extreme threat to the very survival of his ship. There are, of course, significant differences between the two tales: one is narrated chronologically, in the first person, while the other is narrated in the third person,

includes epistolary comments from different persons and does not present events in chronological sequence; one involves a battle with disease, calm, and self-doubt, the other a confrontation with elemental fury and a struggle with anarchy on board; one tells of a young man maturing under the responsibility of a difficult first command, the other of an experienced captain responding heroically under extreme duress. The most significant difference between them, however, is that Captain MacWhirr and the protagonist of The Shadow-Line possess vastly dissimilar imaginations.

The distinction between the two men, however, is much finer than can be expressed simply by saying one is unimaginative and the other is not. Conrad demonstrates in his narrator's suggestion that Captain Giles is unimaginative and in his presentation of The Shadow-Line's protagonist as, at times, excessively imaginative that imagination is not necessarily good nor the lack of it necessarily bad. He also demonstrates that even though MacWhirr has "just enough imagination to carry him through each successive day, and no more"(4), MacWhirr is not totally devoid of that faculty; and his actions in Typhoon show that his getting through the few days this tale covers requires considerable imagination. In fact, as Conrad so effectively asserts, MacWhirr ought to be commended for displaying neither a deficiency nor an excess of imagination.

MacWhirr has often been taken to be Conrad's standard, his conception of how man ought to deal with life in a world where morality seems illusory and where everything appears hostile to man. Thomas Moser suggests that MacWhirr exists "to remind us of what ought to be, the standard by which Conrad vigilantly judges and condemns what is."[1] But this standard is often denigrated as a simplification

of and an escape from the overwhelming complexities of life. Jocelyn Baines's claiming MacWhirr is "stupid" and "obtuse"[2] is a typical reaction to Typhoon. Conrad presents ample evidence in his non-fiction, especially in the letters, that expresses his wish to live without reflecting on life, as MacWhirr is generally able to do. His comment in the "Author's Note" on Victory is one instance of this, but in a letter to Edward Garnett (March 29, 1898), where he mentions his hopes for his young son, Conrad speaks in a tone that seems to support the denigrating attitude many critics assume in their discussions of MacWhirr:

> He is bigger every day. I would like to make a bargeman of him: strong, knowing his business and thinking of nothing. That is the life my dear fellow. Thinking of nothing. O! bliss.[3]

In a letter to R. B. Cunninghame Graham (January 31, 1898) he elaborates on a similar idea:

> What makes mankind tragic is not that they are the victims of nature, it is that they are conscious of it. To be part of the animal kingdom under the conditions of this earth is very well—but as soon as you know of your slavery the pain, the anger, the strife—the tragedy begins. We can't return to nature, since we can't change our place in it. Our refuge is in stupidity, in drunkeness [sic] of all kinds, in lies, in beliefs, in murder, thieving, reforming—in negation, in contempt—each man according to the promptings of his particular devil.[4]

Conrad knows full well the difficulty of living in an age when the general tendency is for man to seek refuge from his lot instead of accepting that lot and attempting to better himself by struggling to understand it. Conrad himself can be found at times wishing he were unable to think and wishing his loved ones, too, could be freed by the bliss of ignorance from the burden of reflective thought. He can even be found avoiding moral issues in some of his fiction. MacWhirr is certainly a standard and a fine example of Conrad's devotion to the

British Merchant Service: he exemplifies heroically the greatness that can be called forth from a man by the traditions and hazards of the Service; but in so doing he illustrates Conrad's refusal to seek refuge from life either in the private bliss of imagination, as Jukes does, or in the denial of responsibility, as does the Nan-Shan's second mate. MacWhirr's story does not glorify ignorance or stupidity; rather, it shows there is a middle ground between imaginative and unimaginative, between the dumb-ox conception of devotion to duty and to traditional standards and the modern nihilistic contention that there neither are nor should be any standards whatsoever. And Conrad creates MacWhirr to occupy in heroic fashion that same middle ground occupied by the protagonist of The Shadow-Line, by Captain Giles, and by Conrad himself when he is at his best, as he most certainly is in Typhoon.

MacWhirr's conducting his ship through a typhoon, leading a demoralized crew to forget its own desperation, establishing order among the two hundred coolies on board, and later redistributing equitably the possessions over which the coolies had been fighting so fiercely all demonstrate MacWhirr's excellence. In doing these things, MacWhirr proves himself capable of responding creatively and rightly to the challenges confronting him. Furthermore, Conrad's presentation of MacWhirr's responses both to the typhoon and to the coolies is an artistic triumph: he conceives the tale as a means of exploring the difficulties involved in dealing with these two problems at once, develops their causal relationship and their other remarkable similarities and shows in MacWhirr what it means to be responsible. In his "Author's Note" in the Typhoon volume, Conrad remarks that he was casting about for a subject for a tale "when the instance of

a steamship full of returning coolies from Singapore to some port in northern China occurred to my recollection." He mentions that this incident was naturally a subject of conversation among seamen at the time and then continues:

> I never met anybody personally concerned in this affair, the interest of which for us was, of course, not the bad weather but the extraordinary complication brought into the ship's life at a moment of exceptional stress by the human element below her deck. Neither was the story itself ever enlarged upon in my hearing. In that company each of us could imagine easily what the whole thing was like. The financial difficulty of it, presenting also a human problem, was solved by a mind much too simple to be perplexed by anything in the world except men's idle talk for which it was not adapted. . . . Yet it was but a bit of a sea yarn after all. I felt that to bring out its deeper significance which was quite apparent to me, something other, something more was required; a leading motive that would harmonize all these violent noises, and a point of view that would put all that elemental fury into its proper place.
>
> What was needed of course was Captain MacWhirr.(v-vi)

His need for "a leading motive" and "a point of view that would put all that elemental fury into its proper place" is more than a technical need, as his solution of the problem indicates. MacWhirr's motive in dealing with the problems he encounters is his instinctive sense of his own responsibilities as leader, and the point of view Conrad was searching for is the narrative stance demanded by his understanding of MacWhirr as both a simple man and an heroic leader. His mention of "all these violent noises" and "that elemental fury" is a deliberate and carefully controlled ambiguity: both the noises and the fury refer to the coolies' fierce brawling and to the violence of wind and wave, both of which are serious threats to MacWhirr's command and each of which is presented so as to define the significance of the other.

Conrad has a good deal of fun telling MacWhirr's story, and the tale is a delight to read. Underlying and qualifying the humor and

irony that demonstrate the limits of MacWhirr's imagination there is always the sense that MacWhirr deserves praise for being able to maintain his ship as "the floating abode of harmony and peace." The story's title indicates at the start that that harmony and peace is seriously endangered by a typhoon, and the exact nature of the danger is precisely defined near the beginning of the tale where Conrad juxtaposes the approach of the typhoon and the potential ferocity of the coolies. The danger, it appears, is not simply external and elemental, but internal and moral. After having presented a succinct biographical sketch of MacWhirr, Conrad proceeds:

> All these events had taken place many years before the morning when, in the chart-room of the steamer Nan-Shan, he stood confronted by the fall of a barometer he had no reason to distrust. The fall—taking into account the excellence of the instrument, the time of the year, and the ship's position on the terrestrial globe—was of a nature ominously prophetic; but the red face of the man betrayed no sort of inward disturbance. Omens were as nothing to him, and he was unable to discover the message of a prophecy till the fulfillment had brought it home to his very door. "That's a fall, and no mistake," he thought. "There must be some uncommonly dirty weather knocking about."
>
> The Nan-Shan was on her way from the southward to the treaty port of Fu-chau, with some cargo in her lower holds, and two hundred chinese coolies returning to their village homes in the province of Fo-kien, after a few years of work in various tropical colonies. The morning was fine, the oily sea heaved without a sparkle, and there was a queer white misty patch in the sky like a halo of the sun. The fore-deck, packed with Chinamen, was full of sombre clothing, yellow faces, and pigtails, sprinkled over with a good many naked shoulders, for there was no wind, and the heat was close. The coolies lounged, talked, smoked, or stared over the rail; some, drawing water over the side, sluiced each other; a few slept on hatches, while several small parties of six sat on their heels surrounding iron trays with plates of rice and tiny teacups; and every single Celestial of them was carrying with him all he had in the world—a wooden chest with a ringing lock and brass on the corners, containing the savings of his labours: some clothes of ceremony, sticks of incense, a little opium maybe, bits of nameless rubbish of conventional value, and a small hoard of silver dollars, toiled for in coal lighters, won in gambling-houses or in petty trading, grubbed out of earth, sweated out in mines, on railway lines, in deadly jungle, under heavy burdens—amassed patiently, guarded with care, cherished fiercely.(6-7)

This masterfully written passage precisely describes the nature of the powerful forces about to be unleashed, and Captain MacWhirr is significantly placed at the centre of this threatening calm. Conrad's comments that MacWhirr lacks imagination and that MacWhirr's "physiognomy . . . was the exact counterpart of his mind"(3) are here given substance as MacWhirr is presented in an actual situation. Because MacWhirr is unimaginative, he does not conceive of the possibility that the "uncommonly dirty weather" has the power to destroy his ship, and the reason his face "betrayed no sort of inward disturbance" is that there was no inward disturbance to betray. MacWhirr has never had the opportunity or the misfortune of facing a typhoon, and even though he has studied typhoons in books, he is incapable of imagining how dangerous the impending typhoon might be. But, as Conrad demonstrates in his portrayal of Jukes, and indeed of all the deck hands, an active imagination can be a curse and a limited imagination a blessing when facing such a deadly menace.

Conrad's presentation of the capability for violence lurking beneath the placid exteriors of the two hundred Chinese coolies requires a more elaborate rhetoric than is employed in speaking of MacWhirr and the weather. Conrad begins the second paragraph in the above passage with a mention of the Nan-Shan's course and destination and notes casually that she is carrying some cargo too irrelevant to specify. He concludes that first sentence emphatically with a concise explanation of the coolies' presence: how many there are, where they are going to and where they have come from. The emphatic positioning of "two hundred Chinese coolies" at the end of the sentence suggests that the presence of these coolies on board the ship is far more significant than the ship's course or the cargo she carries. When Conrad shows the coolies in

action in the paragraph's final sentence, he uses this same rhetorical technique to elaborate the importance of their presence and thereby creates a vivid portrait of and full justification for their latent ferocity. Through a series of verbs and participles indicating the utter leisureliness of their activities he first shows their placidity and the relaxed mood of their journey after years of hard work: they "lounged, talked, smoked, or stared over the rail," "slept," "sat on their heels surrounding iron trays," and "some, drawing water over the side, sluiced each other." One would be hard pressed to imagine a more docile group of passengers. Next he notes that every one "was carrying with him all he had in the world--a wooden chest with a ringing lock and brass on the corners, containing the savings of his labours". The climax of this long sentence is the description of those savings. The remarkable thing about the remainder of this sentence is that there is not another main verb among the more than fifty words left in it. The appositives and participial phrases that round out the sentence subtly portray the reasons for the potential for fierceness in these docile passengers, and the placing of these phrases at the end of an extended sentence both emphasizes the explosive possibilities and illustrates how difficult they are to perceive. The intensity of the presentation exfoliates from the "small hoard of silver dollars," which is itself the climactic item in a series of five, through a series of seven participial phrases explaining the sources of the money, the fourth of which displays most vividly the human value of that silver and elaborates those terms in yet another series, this time a series of emphatic prepositional phrases. The pause indicated by the dash after this fourth participial phrase climaxes Conrad's description of the human cost of those dollars; the final three

phrases after the dash delineate at last the coolies' attitude toward their hard-earned money, and the intensely emphatic position of these phrases stresses the ominous significance of the coolies' latent ferocity.

Unlike the narrator, MacWhirr is not omniscient and does not perceive that this latent ferocity could pose a serious threat to his command. Likewise, MacWhirr cannot imagine the danger signified by the barometer's fall. Captain MacWhirr, says Conrad,

> had sailed over the surface of the oceans as some men go skimming over the years of existence to sink gently into a placid grave, ignorant of life to the last, without ever having been made to see all it may contain of perfidy, of violence, and of terror. There are on sea and land such men thus fortunate—or thus disdained by destiny or by the sea.(19)

MacWhirr, despite his many years in command, lacks not only imagination but experience; in fact, his lack of experience is to a significant extent the cause of his lack of imagination. But when the threatening forces cease to be potential and are unleashed, MacWhirr's instinctive sense of responsibility enables him to assert his authority heroically against potentially overwhelming dangers. He proves himself in dealing with the problems facing him, and his lack of imagination prevents him from the paralysis of apprehension that overcomes Jukes. Only prior to his facing the typhoon was he "disdained by destiny or by the sea."

Just how ignorant MacWhirr is of the danger posed by the coolies is made clearer a little later in the comical scene with Jukes where MacWhirr expresses astonishment at his first mate's referring to those coolies as "passengers." But a more emphatic dramatization of his ignorance occurs at the beginning of chapter two, where Conrad orchestrates the violent potential of the coolies with the ever-

increasing signs of viciously bad weather:

> The Nan-Shan was ploughing a vanishing furrow upon the circle of the sea that had the surface and the shimmer of an undulating piece of gray silk. The sun, pale and without rays, poured down leaden heat in a strangely indecisive light, and the Chinamen were lying prostrate about the decks. The bloodless, pinched, yellow faces were like the faces of bilious invalids. Captain MacWhirr noticed two of them especially, stretched out on their backs below the bridge. As soon as they had closed their eyes they seemed dead. Three others, however, were quarrelling barbarously away forward; and one big fellow, half naked, with herculean shoulders, was hanging limply over a winch; another, sitting on the deck, his knees up and his head drooping sideways in a girlish attitude, was plaiting his pigtail with infinite languor depicted in his whole person and in the very movement of his fingers. The smoke struggled with difficulty out of the funnel, and instead of streaming away spread itself out like an infernal sort of cloud, smelling of sulphur and raining soot all over the decks.(21)

After a brief exchange between MacWhirr and Jukes concerning the new coal bags, the description of ship and coolies continues:

> The propeller thumped, the three Chinamen forward had given up squabbling very suddenly, and the one who had been plaiting his tail clasped his legs and stared dejectedly over his knees. The lurid sunshine cast faint and sickly shadows. The swell ran higher and swifter every moment, and the ship lurched heavily in the smooth, deep hollows of the sea. (22)

The peaceful progress of the Nan-Shan over the smooth, silky sea is complemented by the tranquility of the coolies; however, Conrad indicates that in both cases the peacefulness is not relaxed, but unhealthy. The oppressive heat and stillness prevent the smoke from being dissipated as it should be and at the same time cause the coolies to languish about the decks. In the midst of this scene three of the coolies are "quarrelling barbarously," and Conrad makes plain that MacWhirr is unaware of their quarrel. Instead of noticing them, he is attracted by the two others whose discomfiture is so extreme they appear lifeless. The captain's not seeing this outburst is thereby dramatized and balanced against his ignorance of what the fall in baro-

metric pressure might mean for the safety of his ship. Conrad's presentation of the quarrel dramatizes the deceptive nature of the coolies' tranquil appearance, and here he proceeds from his earlier juxtaposing of the two approaching dangers to a blending of the presentation of both in one dramatic rendering. The sudden cessation of the quarrel, complemented as it is by the presence of "lurid sunshine," "sickly shadows," and the vivid portrait of that single dejected coolie, is rendered ominously significant by the crescendo of swells and hollows closing out the description. The barbarous quarrel signals the approach of violence almost as surely as the fall of the barometer does the approach of the typhoon. And MacWhirr is poignantly unaware of both dangers until they cross the boundary of potentiality and become fact.

Conrad's respect for MacWhirr prior to this dual test of his responsibility is, to a significant extent, based on the esteem of his position as captain. In a letter, Jukes concludes his analysis of the captain's abilities by saying, "'He's too dense to trouble about, and that's the truth'"(18), and yet Jukes is also aware of MacWhirr's competence for command, for earlier in the same letter he says:

> "As to our old man, you could not find a quieter skipper. Sometimes you would think he hadn't sense enough to see anything wrong. And yet it isn't that. Can't be. He has been in command for a good few years now. He doesn't do anything actually foolish, and gets his ship along all right without worrying anybody."(17)

Even though this judgment of MacWhirr comes from Jukes, it is largely an accurate one. Conrad's presentation of MacWhirr at this early stage in the tale shows clearly enough how one could easily have believed MacWhirr "hadn't sense enough to see anything wrong," and the assertion of his quietness and competence in keeping his ship in order serves to temper the judgment and render it more precise.

MacWhirr does not have the imagination to see anything wrong yet, simply because the threats are not yet real, and so he proceeds to keep his ship operating as if there was nothing wrong. Although he does not realize it, Jukes has accurately assessed his captain; but Jukes is not satisfied with making accurate judgments and lacks the delicacy Conrad demonstrates in expressing his own judgments of MacWhirr, so Jukes throws up his hands and claims MacWhirr is "too dense to trouble about," thereby discarding his previous assessment as insufficient.

The simple fact that MacWhirr has managed to become captain and to keep out of trouble is proof he has so far been equal to the challenges his job has presented to him. Conrad's comments on MacWhirr's vague knowledge of circular storms, however, helps introduce a further point about MacWhirr's lack of imagination:

> The wisdom of his country had pronounced by means of an Act of Parliament that before he could be considered as fit to take charge of a ship he should be able to answer certain simple questions on the subject of circular storms such as hurricanes, cyclones, typhoons; and apparently he had answered them, since he was now in command of the Nan-Shan in the China seas during the season of typhoons. But if he had answered he remembered nothing of it. He was, however, conscious of being made uncomfortable by the clammy heat.(20).

This little bit of criticism of the relevance of that test required for certification as captain in the British Merchant Service helps draw the line between practical men like MacWhirr and more imaginative men like Captain Wilson of the Melita. MacWhirr was practical enough to study the subject of circular storms as was required of him before he could command a ship. He remembers nothing of that subject because up to now there has been no occasion for him to make use of such knowledge. Captain Wilson, however, has made a vocation of studying about storms. The irony is that Wilson never allows himself to get

close enough to a storm to have any real experience of it, but he claims to be an expert on the subject and is generally recognized as such. For all he or anyone else knows, the storms he says he avoided may not have been located where he thought they were or as dangerous as he thought them to be. Here is what MacWhirr thinks of Captain Wilson's expertise:

> "A gale is a gale, Mr. Jukes," resumed the Captain, "and a full-powered steam-ship has got to face it. There's just so much dirty weather knocking about the world, and the proper thing is to go through it with none of what old Captain Wilson of the Melita calls 'storm strategy.' The other day ashore I heard him hold forth about it to a lot of shipmasters who came in and sat at a table next to mine. It seemed to me the greatest nonsense. He was telling them how he out-manoeuvred, I think he said, a terrific gale, so that it never came nearer than fifty miles to him. A neat piece of head-work he called it. How he knew there was a terrific gale fifty miles off beats me altogether. It was like listening to a crazy man. I would have thought Captain Wilson was old enough to know better."(34-35)

Meteorologists, such as Captain Wilson claims to be, might profess their ability to forecast accurately the exact location and intensity of a storm, but anyone who has paid any attention to weather forecasts knows full well that even with the help of weather satellites and other sophisticated equipment not available to Captain Wilson, those forecasts are remarkably inaccurate. As long as Wilson never faces a storm directly when practising his strategy, however, he can claim with little fear of refutation that he actually succeeded in dodging the storm.

MacWhirr seems to concede to Wilson the need for a storm strategy for sailing ships so they might avoid severe wind conditions, but MacWhirr's argument that to navigate around a storm whose intensity and location are indiscernible is a convincing, logical refutation of Wilson's strategy in so far as it concerns steamships. The tale makes clear that there are two ways a steamship could cope with a typhoon

on the open sea: one is to consume more coal and take more time in order to avoid a storm that, since one could never know if one's suppositions were accurate, is little more than imaginary. The other is to go one's own way and respond as necessary to whatever hazards may be encountered. A reader with excessive imagination might laugh at MacWhirr's straightforward, plainspeaking argument against his using Wilson's strategy, but the facts of the case demonstrate that his argument is accurate and that MacWhirr's method of dealing with the storm is the more responsible one. After witnessing a drastic drop in atmospheric pressure such as he had never before witnessed, MacWhirr proceeds to his cabin and begins to read Wilson's book in the hope of learning more about what he is up against, but instead of learning from the book, he finds it to be just so much jargon:

> He lost himself amongst advancing semi-circles, left- and right-hand quadrants, the curves of the tracks, the probable bearing of the centre, the shifts of wind and the readings of barometer. He tried to bring all these into a definite relation to himself, and ended by becoming contemptuously angry with such a lot of words and with so much advice, all head-work and supposition, without a glimmer of certitude.(33)

At first glance, this might appear to be a case of Conrad's making fun of MacWhirr's lack of imagination. The fact is, however, that MacWhirr's feeling that Wilson's book has no "definite relation" to his own situation is completely justified. "'Here he says that the centre of them things bears eight points off the wind; but we haven't got any wind, for all the barometer falling. Where's his centre now?'"(33) Conrad unequivocally endorses MacWhirr's approach to managing the ship and shows it to be the right approach. MacWhirr is unimaginative, but he is neither stupid nor unresponsive, and his matter-of-fact attitude saves him from steaming blindly and unnecessarily around a storm he knows nothing about.

Once the onset of the typhoon renders MacWhirr's decision to go ahead full steam irreversible, the stage is set for the test of his ability to command under the most extreme of conditions. The eventual outcome of his battle against the typhoon is more a result of luck than anything else, but his success in conquering his own crew's demoralization and in controlling the human storm that erupts between the decks is entirely his own. MacWhirr's inability even to close his cabin door is evidence of his helplessness against the elements:

> He went through all the movements of a woman putting on her bonnet before a glass, with a strained, listening attention, as though he had expected every moment to hear the shout of his name in the confused clamour that had suddenly beset his ship. Its increase filled his ears while he was getting ready to go out and confront whatever it might mean. It was tumultuous and very loud—made up of the rush of the wind, the crashes of the sea, with that prolonged deep vibration of the air, like the roll of an immense and remote drum beating the charge of the gale.
>
> He stood for a moment in the light of the lamp, thick, clumsy, shapeless in his panoply of combat, vigilant and red-faced.
>
> "There's a lot of weight in this," he muttered.
>
> As soon as he attempted to open the door the wind caught it. Clinging to the handle, he was dragged out over the doorstep, and at once found himself engaged with the wind in a sort of personal scuffle whose object was the shutting of that door. At the last moment a tongue of air scurried in and licked out the flame of the lamp.(36-37)

This brilliantly rendered little dramatic scene expresses magnificently and delightfully just how ridiculously inadequate MacWhirr is to do battle with the storm. He is depicted as a woman donning a bonnet—a mock-heroic comparison if ever there was one—which then becomes his "panoply of combat" as he prepares to wrestle with the wind. The image of a bonnetted woman charging into combat illustrates how preposterous it would be to expect MacWhirr or any man to conquer the elements, and the extreme difficulty he encounters in attempting to shut the door dramatically reinforces the implications of that image.

The test in which MacWhirr at least has a chance, however, is the threat of anarchy on board ship that accompanies the typhoon. It is this moral threat against which MacWhirr proves his heroic mettle. Here is how Conrad defines the moral impact of the typhoon:

> It was something formidable and swift, like the sudden smashing of a vial of wrath. It seemed to explode all round the ship with an overpowering concussion and a rush of great waters, as if an immense dam had been blown up to windward. In an instant the men lost touch of each other. This is the disintegrating power of a great wind: it isolates one from one's kind. An earth quake, a landslip, an avalanche, overtake a man incidentally, as it were—without passion. A furious gale attacks him like a personal enemy, tries to grasp his limbs, fastens upon his mind, seeks to rout the very spirit out of him.(40)

Conrad's personification of the wind as a personal enemy seeking to rout the very spirit out of the men blends together the physical and the moral dangers posed by the typhoon. Conrad realizes this conception first in his description of Jukes's despair and then in his portrait of the rest of the crew, tucked away in the dark under the bridge whining "after a light to get drowned by"(54). Jukes's position as second in command renders his despair all the more significant, for his inability to act at the time of crisis demonstrates how the entire burden of responsibility for the ship rests squarely on MacWhirr's shoulders. Before MacWhirr arrives on the bridge, Jukes is in charge, but the typhoon's ferocity quickly begins to demoralize him when he realizes that this is indeed no ordinary spell of dirty weather. Luckily, MacWhirr takes over and relieves Jukes of his awesome responsibility; from this point on, the captain is alone with that responsibility and must rely completely on himself to bring the ship through.

As the typhoon gathers intensity, Jukes's imagination gains ascendancy over him, leads him to believe that nothing can be done,

and renders him indifferent to the demands of the community which he is supposed to be serving. This analysis of Jukes's state of mind comes just after the boatswain informs MacWhirr of the trouble with the coolies below:

> Jukes remained indifferent, as if rendered irresponsible by the force of the hurricane, which made the very thought of action utterly vain. Besides, being very young, he had found the occupation of keeping his heart completely steeled against the worst so engrossing that he had come to feel an overpowering dislike towards any other form of activity whatever. He was not scared; he knew this because, firmly believing he would never see another sunrise, he remained calm in that belief.
>
> These are the moments of do-nothing heroics to which even good men surrender at times. Many officers of ships can no doubt recall a case in their experience when just such a trance of confounded stoicism would come all at once over a whole ship's company. Jukes, however, had no wide experience of men or storms. He conceived himself to be calm--inexorably calm; but as a matter of fact he was daunted . . . . (51)

Jukes's egoism subverts his official responsibilities; instead of doing what he can to help, Jukes imagines he is about to die, and the fear engendered by that belief paralyzes him. Like the rest of the crew cowering below in the dark, Jukes is totally demoralized by the storm. Among the deck hands, the boatswain alone has been able to resist the dispiriting powers of the typhoon, and so when he discovers the Chinese rioting below, he immediately reports to the captain. After a long and difficult battle with the noise and violence of the storm and with Jukes's nearly impenetrable indifference, MacWhirr finally gets his order through to Jukes; that order provides Jukes with something to do and summarily cures his paralysis. Jukes goes below, and his conveying the order in turn provides the crew with something to do so that now they are all inspired to rush fearlessly into the 'tween-deck area and restore order among the brawling coolies.

The men in the engine-room react rather differently to the onset of the typhoon, and the contrast between the two groups is significant.

Before Jukes leads the attack on the rioting Chinese, he visits the engine-room, and from there communicates the extent and nature of the trouble to MacWhirr through the speaking-tube. Solomon Rout forcefully asserts the contrast between the morale of the engine-room and that of the deck hands when he says to Jukes, "'You fellows are going wrong for want of something to do'"(75). The men in the engine-room are physically fortified against the vision of doom that might have overpowered them if they had been on deck, and their work proceeds the same as it always has. When the speed indicator jumps from FULL to STOP, they too are made to feel helpless, for it seems that this is a signal that all their work is for naught. This feeling of helplessness, however, occupies but a fleeting moment and is not the forerunner of despair.

Conrad's dramatization of the unleashed fury of two hundred Chinese coolies is a superb piece of writing, and he makes the significance of that fury all the more emphatic by timing the lull in the storm to coincide with the restoration of order between the decks:

> With every roll of the ship the long rows of sitting Celestials would sway forward brokenly, and her headlong dives knocked together the line of shaven polls from end to end. When the wash of water rolling on the deck died away for a moment, it seemed to Jukes, yet quivering from his exertions, that in his mad struggle down there he had overcome the wind somehow: that a silence had fallen upon the ship, a silence in which the sea struck thunderously at her sides.(79)

The sudden silence is a striking contrast to the storm's deafening roar, and it reemphasizes the point that although MacWhirr is helpless against the typhoon, his order to Jukes successfully counteracts the storm's demoralizing effects: it tames the human hurricane on board his ship and restores vitality to his demoralized crew. Conrad further intensifies the linking between the two kinds of storm in this succinct exchange between MacWhirr and Jukes during the lull:

"We have done it, sir," he gasped.
"Thought you would," said Captain MacWhirr.
"Did you?" murmured Jukes to himself.
"Wind fell at once," went on the Captain.
Jukes burst out: "If you think it was an easy job—"
But his captain, clinging to the rail, paid no attention. "According to the books, the worst is not over yet."
"If most of them hadn't been half dead with seasickness and fright, not one of us would have come out of that 'tween-deck alive," said Jukes.
"Had to do what's fair by them," mumbled MacWhirr stolidly. "You don't find everything in books."(81)

Conrad's skillful blending of the references to books and the two violent threats to the ship expresses precisely Conrad's assessment of MacWhirr's total performance. MacWhirr rejects Captain Wilson's strategy and demonstrates that his restoration of order aboard ship is the enactment of his own heroic wisdom; MacWhirr, however, is not over-confident. He realizes that although Wilson's strategy is of little practical value, he should heed Wilson's saying that the lull does not signal the end of the typhoon. The placing of the individual statements in the above dialogue makes it look as if the crew causes the lull, and Jukes's earlier feeling shows he believes there is a mysterious causal relation here; but Conrad avoids the danger of claiming human supremacy over the elements by asserting the powerful presence of Captain MacWhirr, whose statements are strictly limited to matters of fact. MacWhirr does not believe for a moment that the crew had anything to do with the storm's waning: it would require far more imagination than MacWhirr possesses to conceive of such a possibility.

Conrad wisely refrains from implying there is more of a connection than MacWhirr is aware of. The link between the crew's action and the wind's dying is a circumstantial but also a moral one, created by Conrad's artistry. The world he depicts is true to life, but since Typhoon is art, it can offer moral judgments of human experience—

something a mere transcription of that experience could never do. The linking here helps to render Conrad's judgments of MacWhirr all the more poignant; Conrad's success in dramatizing this test of MacWhirr's competence is achieved through a careful demarcation of the boundary between the realm of human responsibility and the forces of nature, and a further delineation of the abilities of this one captain. No man is a match for a typhoon, but MacWhirr does all he can to keep the ship afloat and on course. Without some luck on his side, however, he could not have pulled her through. To say the storm is only interesting because of the human problem on board, however, would be as misleading as to claim the anarchy on board simply complicates the battle with the typhoon: both are equally interesting and they are made so by Conrad's blending them so as to bring out the moral significance of the episode.

MacWhirr and Jukes both comment during the lull that the worst is yet to come: one is referring to the weather, the other to the coolies. Conrad declines to present directly an account of what happens in either case. All he shows is the end result: the Nan-Shan crippled by the second onslaught of the typhoon and restored to tranquility in port after the coolies disembark. The events of the interim are related in letters by MacWhirr, Rout, and Jukes, and Conrad offers his further analysis of MacWhirr's performance by balancing the commentaries these three offer. In presenting the events in this way, Conrad continues his linking of the moral and meteorological elements, offers a commentary that results from an active collaboration of three men, and reinforces the sense of community in the group of men MacWhirr heads.

Conrad's vivid portrait of the Nan-Shan limping into port as if she had just risen from beneath the waters after a glimpse of the

Great Beyond is a truly remarkable piece or writing, but the portrait would not have been complete without the presence of the malignantly introverted second mate. The battle to regain control of the ship at the height of the storm is won without his help; in fact, he is present on the bridge with MacWhirr, but instead of helping, he tries to demoralize the already weakening helmsman and ends up crouched on the floor, trembling with fear. Jukes responds to MacWhirr's order not because he thinks he can do some good, but because he has been trained to follow orders, and his obedience to MacWhirr's command effectively maintains the community the wind had threatened to disintegrate. On the other hand, the second mate's presence on the bridge is a constant reminder of what Jukes and the rest of the crew could have become if MacWhirr had not asserted his authority and given them a purposeful activity to perform. MacWhirr's ostracizing of the second mate from the community is his emphatic assertion of the community's right to demand from its members the responsibility that is necessary to its continued existence. The second mate is clearly devoid of any sense of such responsibility. His failure to participate in the human community is signified by his refusal to write any letters, or even to speak to other crew members, and in these matters he is unique among the characters of Typhoon. The initial sketch Conrad presents of the second mate in action deserves some comment, since it directly addresses this point. The combination of dialogue and commentary here conveys a powerful and appropriate condemnation of the second mate and his anti-social behavior:

> "Doesn't look so bad, after all—does it?"
> The second mate was marching to and fro on the bridge, tripping down with small steps one moment, and the next climbing with difficulty the shifting slope of the deck. At the sound of Jukes' voice he stood still, facing forward, but made no reply.

> "Hallo! That's a heavy one," said Jukes, swaying to meet the long roll till his lowered hand touched the planks. This time the second mate made in his throat a noise of an unfriendly nature.
>
> He was an oldish, shabby little fellow, with bad teeth and no hair on his face. He had been shipped in a hurry in Shanghai . . . .
>
> Jukes was not discouraged by the unsympathetic sound. "The Chinamen must be having a lovely time of it down there," he said. "It's lucky for them the old girl has the easiest roll of any ship I've ever been in. There now! This one wasn't so bad."
>
> "You wait," snarled the second mate.
>
> With his sharp nose, red at the tip, and his thin pinched lips, he always looked as though he were raging inwardly; and he was concise in his speech to the point of rudeness. All his time off duty he spent in his cabin with the door shut, keeping so still in there that he was supposed to fall asleep as soon as he had disappeared; but the man who came in to wake him for his watch on deck would invariably find him with his eyes wide open, flat on his back in the bunk, and glaring irritably from a soiled pillow. He never wrote any letters, did not seem to hope for news from anywhere; and though he had been heard once to mention West Hartlepool, it was with extreme bitterness, and only in connection with the extortionate charges of a boarding-house.(27-28)

This is Conrad at his finest, from his vivid presentation of the man's unnatural appearance to the dramatic placing of him with his back to Jukes. Everything about the second mate reeks of hostility to his fellow man, and Conrad here blends dialogue, drama, description, and commentary in a convincing way to affirm the second mate's essential inhumanity.

The other officers, however, are responsible members of the human race and of the seafaring world, and their letters are strong evidence of this. Although MacWhirr is committed to communicating with and supporting his family, he is a man of few words. He writes letters home out of respect for the obligations he has to his wife and children. The repetitive, almost painful regularity of his correspondence is further evidence of MacWhirr's lack of imagination, but his letter-writing indicates he is quite other than an incommunicative man. The letter he writes home after the typhoon is a fine sample of MacWhirr's

simple attempts at communication; as is apparent in the steward's reaction to it, the letter expresses a keenly felt judgment of the dangers the ship has passed through and of MacWhirr's own handling of the coolies' property. It states MacWhirr's assessment of the typhoon's intensity and of the danger presented by the coolies: now he has had the experience, no imagination is required to speak of these things, and he apparently does so rather forcefully. Conrad does not present the letter itself, but only portions of it to show how Mrs. MacWhirr has come to view her husband's letters:

> The paper rustled sharply. " . . . . A calm that lasted more than twenty minutes," she read perfunctorily; and the next words her thoughtless eyes caught, on the top of another page, were: "see you and the children again. . . ." She had a movement of impatience. He was always thinking of coming home. He had never had such a good salary before. What was the matter now?
>
> It did not occur to her to turn back overleaf to look. She would have found it recorded there that between 4 and 6 A. M. on December 25th, Captain MacWhirr did actually think that his ship could not possibly live another hour in such a sea, and that he would never see his wife and children again. Nobody was to know this (his letters got mislaid so quickly)—nobody whatever but the steward, who had been greatly impressed by that disclosure. So much so, that he tried to give the cook some idea of the "narrow squeak we all had" by saying solemnly, "The old man himself had a dam' poor opinion of our chance."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Mrs. MacWhirr glanced farther, on the alert. ". . . Do what's fair. . . . Miserable objects . . . . Only three, with a broken leg each, and one . . . . Thought had better keep the matter quiet . . . hope to have done the fair thing . . . ."
>
> She let fall her hands. No; there was nothing more about coming home. Must have been merely expressing a pious wish. Mrs. MacWhirr's mind was set at ease, and a black marble clock, priced by the local jeweller at £3 18s. 6d. had a discreet stealthy tick.(93-94)

Her reaction to the mention of his coming home is impressive evidence of her thoughtlessness and of the fact that she does not care about her husband except as a source of income; the touch about the price of the clock reinforces that point nicely. Her aversion to his coming

home is so strong that it leads her to overlook that part of the letter spelling out his fears that he would not live to see his family again. Mrs. MacWhirr thus proves herself to be of the same ilk as the antisocial second mate. She appears to read the letter as her husband attempted to read Wilson's jargon: she tries to bring its contents into a definite relation to herself. But Conrad's presentation is a parody of how one ought to read. The significant difference between her and her husband is that she reads the letter only to reinforce her own feelings, but he tackles Wilson's book in an honest attempt to learn something. MacWhirr writes the letter to share with his wife a horrifying experience, and in so doing he affirms his commitment to life in the human community; on the other hand, her refusal to share that experience with him shows her to be an egocentric, unloving woman.

Jukes's "animated and very full" account of the typhoon and its aftermath likewise affirms his commitment to humanity. This is evidenced by his friend's reception of it: he shares the letter with all his fellow-officers. Jukes's letter expresses his fear that the coolies, if they were to be let out of the 'tween-deck area, would brutally attack the officers to regain possession of their money. His own solution to the problem is to "throw the whole lot of these dollars down to them and leave them to fight it out amongst themselves, while we get a rest." But this suggestion would violate all the best traditions of the Service and would negate all that the crew had done to restore order during the typhoon. When Jukes lays this proposition before MacWhirr, the captain rejects it outright: "'Now you talk wild, Jukes,'" he says. "'We must plan something that would be fair to all parties!'"(99). The ensuing scene portrays Jukes leading a charge of seven armed men into the calm of the chart-room

where MacWhirr is distributing the money. This is a delightful sample of Conrad at his comic best:

> "I hadn't been asleep in my bunk ten minutes when in rushes the steward and begins to pull at my leg.
>
> "'For God's sake, Mr. Jukes, come out! Come on deck quick, sir. Oh, do come out!'
>
> "The fellow scared all the sense out of me. I didn't know what had happened: another hurricane—or what. Could hear no wind.
>
> "'The Captain's letting them out. Oh, he is letting them out! Jump on deck, sir, and save us. The chief engineer has just run below for his revolver.'
>
> "That's what I understood the fool to say. However, Father Rout swears he went in there only to get a clean pocket-handkerchief. Anyhow, I made one jump into my trousers and flew on deck aft. There was certainly a good deal of noise going on forward of the bridge. Four of the hands with the boss'en were at work abaft. I passed up to them some of the rifles all the ships on the China coast carry in the cabin, and led them on the bridge. On the way I ran against Old Sol, looking startled and sucking at an unlighted cigar.
>
> "'Come along,' I shouted to him.
>
> "We charged, the seven of us, up to the chart-room. All was over. There stood the old man with his sea-boots still drawn up to the hips and in shirt-sleeves—got warm thinking it out, I suppose. Bun-hin's dandy clerk at his elbow, as dirty as a sweep, was still green in the face. I could see directly I was in for something.
>
> "'What the devil are these monkey tricks, Mr. Jukes?' asks the old man, as angry as ever he could be. I tell you frankly, it made me lose my tongue. 'For God's sake, Mr. Jukes,' says he, 'do take away these rifles from the men. Somebody's sure to get hurt before long if you don't. Damme, if this ship isn't worse than Bedlam! Look sharp now. I want you up here to help me and Bun-hin's Chinaman to count that money. You wouldn't mind lending a hand, too, Mr. Rout, now you are here. The more of us the better . . . .'"(99-100)

It is significant that as soon as Jukes hears something is happening, he expects it is probably "another hurricane" and begins listening for wind. This incident again demonstrates the power of Jukes's over-active imagination, and here the steward provides the necessary stimulus. But MacWhirr's assessment of Jukes's impetuous action is sound commentary on the mate's immaturity, and that assessment is supported dramatically by the events themselves. Jukes's own mention of the steward's "pulling his leg" and the imagined need of a revolver for the chief

engineer when a handkerchief was all that was wanted further undercut the first mate's heroic pretensions. The remarkable thing is that this all comes from Jukes's own letter, thereby presenting Jukes himself as a supporter of the implicit claim that MacWhirr is a far abler officer than he.

Jukes's letter also points out the superiority of British Christian justice over the oriental conception of the role of legal authority. It becomes clear to MacWhirr that, given the oriental official's desires for self-enrichment through his performance of his duties, old-fashioned British justice can only be meted out at sea, where the captain is king. Conrad suggests a comparison of MacWhirr and another king, the biblical Solomon, when he presents the funny little misunderstanding between Solomon Rout's wife and the vicar: the vicar mistakenly assumes a quotation from her husband's letter to be one from the Bible. The comparison shows that like Solomon's, MacWhirr's most memorable act concerns the division of property, the ownership of which is in dispute. The comparison demands respect for MacWhirr's equitable division[6] of the dollars and demonstrates that to be competent as captain one must be a fair judge as well, and MacWhirr is a success on that score. The tale closes with Jukes's final assessment of MacWhirr: "'I think he got out of it very well for such a stupid man'"(102). To an excessively imaginative man like Jukes, MacWhirr would seem stupid, but the tale clearly shows MacWhirr to be a better man than Jukes--in fact a hero. MacWhirr manages, with some luck, to get out of it very well, whereas Jukes, because of his excessive imagination, might not have gotten out of it at all.

Solomon Rout, the chief engineer, writes a letter home after the typhoon; he also expresses a judgment of MacWhirr's performance. He

remarks that although MacWhirr is a simple man, he has done something "rather clever"—a judgment with which Conrad concurs. Rout's main interest, however, is not in talking about MacWhirr, but in expressing an earnest desire made stronger by his having come so near dying: he wants now, more than ever, to be near his wife. Like MacWhirr, Rout is unimaginative, but his experience of the typhoon brought home to him the precarious nature of his hold on life and made him realize the value of his family ties. Ironically, it is his responsibility to his aged mother that prevents his wife from coming to be with him.

MacWhirr is a standard, but he is not an embodiment of Conrad's alleged belief that man can be happy only if he lowers his expectations and doggedly performs his duty; Conrad has no such belief. If every man were as sure of his moral principles as Captain MacWhirr, no one would talk disparagingly of lowering expectations or of doing one's duty; indeed, Typhoon would not be important in such a world, since the traditional standards it supports would be the common basis for moral judgment and action. Since such a world does not exist, Typhoon's great worth is that it argues convincingly in favor of traditional standards and against the modern belief in the preeminence of the individual mind.

V

The Shadow-Line:

Self-possession and Wisdom

Though often considered to be mere autobiography or to evoke the mysterious profundities of the supernatural, The Shadow-Line ranks with Typhoon as one of Conrad's most perfect tales. It lacks the complexity of pattern and the immense breadth of scope that enrich Nostromo and The Secret Agent and the sense of inevitability that renders Conrad's portrait of Heyst's and Lena's victory so compelling, but The Shadow-Line displays Conrad in complete control of his often unwieldy eloquence and, instead of presenting dramatic spectacle for its own sake, as his other works sometimes do, dramatizes a man struggling to strengthen his self-possession and to gain the mature wisdom only a full understanding of experience can bring. Few others, however, would claim such preeminence for this tale.[1] Douglas Hewitt comes close when he says that The Shadow-Line is free from "the lush and imprecise rhetoric and the portentous and equally imprecise moralizing which mar Lord Jim and which are predominant features of Chance and Victory and The Rover and The Arrow of Gold";[2] but he claims these are absent here not because Conrad exerts greater control over his subject but because he limits the scope of this tale so as to avoid dealing with the problem of evil.

The Shadow-Line, however, does deal with the problem of evil, though not as dramatically as Victory. The moral problem faced by the protagonist of The Shadow-Line is not so much how to cope with external problems as it is how to exercise self-reliance and develop moral stamina when deprived of the opportunity to act. The calm he endures

threatens as serious an evil as does the typhoon that batters the Nan-Shan.

Albert J. Guerard, Jr., wants to see The Shadow-Line as the portrait of a night journey into the unconscious. It is not surprising then that he would claim this tale is "distinctly less perfect" than "The Secret Sharer" and proceed to suggest that "to make the two stories truly analogous we need only cut out the first two chapters of The Shadow-Line."[3] Such amputation would be justified, he argues, since "the first two chapters are seriously defective" in that they portray the period of "undefined anxiety" during which the captain was dealing with the material difficulties involved in getting his ship underway:

> Conrad apparently conceived of The Shadow-Line as dealing with the passage from ignorant and untested confidence through a major trial to the very different confidence of mature self-command. So conceived the story ought logically to have reflected, in its first pages, a naive and buoyant confidence.[4]

Ian Watt, contending that The Shadow-Line is one of Conrad's finest achievements,[5] notes how the "slowness" of the tale's opening has not generally been appreciated and goes on to register his disagreement with Guerard on this point:

> When Guerard, then, complains that the narrator's "irritability" "at last becomes irritating to the reader," it is surely because he doesn't see it as part of the novel's form and meaning that the reader should experience for himself the irritating obtuseness of the narrator's resistance to Captain Giles's well-meaning interference, a resistance whose narrative climax is the comically laborious double-take over his first command, but whose ultimate function is to exhibit for the reader the whole complex of conflicting emotions which characterise the onset of that penumbral transition from late youth to committed adulthood which is Conrad's professed subject.[6]

Watt, however, does not dispute Guerard's claim that the opening chapters reflect the protagonist's emotions; rather, he concedes this point and claims that such reflection is purposeful and essential to Conrad's presentation.

Contrary to what Watt and Guerard claim, the early chapters of this tale do not simply "reflect" the young man's emotional condition or merely "exhibit for the reader the whole complex of [his] conflicting emotions." The best way to define the error Watt and Guerard share is to point to their failure to distinguish between the young man who abandons his berth and the narrator telling the tale. Both are the same man, of course, but the tone of the narrative emphasizes throughout that the story is told by the mature captain who has experienced what he relates and who has come to understand the significance of that experience. Indeed, the narrator's tone is proof that the youth in the tale has gained the wisdom the tale shows him to have gained.

Even in the opening sentence, where the narrator asserts, "Only the young have such moments,"(3) it is clear he speaks not as a youth but as an older man who has gained a reasonable perspective on the events of his youth. Consider how the distance between the young man experiencing the events and the older man telling of them shapes the way in which the narrator defines his abandoning his berth:

> This is not a marriage story. It wasn't so bad as that with me. My action, rash as it was, had more the character of divorce—almost of desertion. For no reason on which a sensible person could put a finger I threw up my job—chucked my berth—left the ship of which the worst that could be said was that she was a steamship and therefore, perhaps, not entitled to that blind loyalty which. . . . However, it's no use trying to put a gloss on what even at the time I myself half suspected to be a caprice.(4)

He clearly understands that when he left Kent's ship, he was being rash, unreasonable, capricious; he notes that "It wasn't so bad as that with me" and in so doing implies that although it was not so bad as it might have been if this had been a marriage story, it was still bad; and he demonstrates his control of himself and his subject when he stops himself from trying to make even the slightest excuse

for his rashness. The speaker here is the mature man who, at the end of his difficult voyage from Bangkok to Singapore, conversed as an equal with the exemplary and wise Captain Giles. "At the time," he says, even he "half suspected" his abandoning Kent's ship "to be a caprice," but now he asserts that he fully knows it to have been a caprice. Furthermore, his presentation of this tale demonstrates his understanding of how that capricious act made possible his later acquisition of wisdom.

He gave up his job with Kent even though, he admits, "I could not have been happier if I had had the life and the men made to my order by a benevolent Enchanter"(5). The reason for his capriciousness is most concisely expressed here:

> The past eighteen months, so full of new and varied experience, appeared a dreary, prosaic waste of days. I felt—how shall I express it?—that there was no truth to be got out of them. What truth? I should have been hard put to explain. Probably, if pressed, I would have burst into tears simply. I was young enough for that.(7)

The young man felt the past eighteen months had been "a dreary, prosaic waste of days," but the narrator in his wisdom realizes that in fact those months were "full of new and varied experience" that should have provided ample opportunity for fulfillment. The young man's appraisal of that experience, however, was dominated by his strong but as yet immature emotions. The narrator emphasizes this point when he shows how he was, at that time totally incapable of expressing rationally what truth he thought was missing from his life: instead of coherent speech, an emotional outburst, and a characteristically childish one at that, would have been his response to a determined inquiry into his motives.

The narrator points out elsewhere that Captains Giles and Kent

knew what he was going through but were wise enough also to know that whatever he was looking for no one else could find for him. Captain Kent is simply shown to remark that "he hoped I would find what I was so anxious to go and look for,"(6) but the narrator dramatizes at length how Captain Giles employed his wisdom to maneuver the young man into the position where he could discover for himself the opportunity Captain Giles knew awaited him at the Harbour Office. Captain Giles found a way around the man's youthful obtuseness, just as, being an expert in intricate navigation, he had found passage through innumerable reefs and shoals.

The narrator introduces Captain Giles by noting that

> He had the appearance of a man from whom you would expect sound advice, moral sentiments, with perhaps a platitude or two thrown in on occasion, not from a desire to dazzle, but from honest conviction.(12)

The young protagonist would much rather have met someone in the Officers' Sailors' Home by whom he could have been dazzled; Captain Giles's expressions of his honest convictions were too "dull" and "unimaginative"(15) to satisfy his vague yearning for excitement. So when Captain Giles kindly insisted the conversation they had overheard between Hamilton and the Steward concerned both the young man and a mysterious letter from the Harbour Office, the young man grew more and more exasperated, so bound up in his own uncertainties and his own feelings that he could not imagine there should have been anything afoot in the outside world that could have had any connection with him personally. When Captain Giles, careful all the while not to be too complete in divulging what he knew, related his observations of the peon from the Harbour Office, the letter he was carrying, and the Steward's response to it, the young protagonist was so irritated he

concluded Captain Giles was "stupid and overrated"(23), "the most tactless idiot on earth"(22). Consider how he assessed Captain Giles's statement of those personal observations:

> With increasing animation he stated again that I had missed his point. Entirely. And in a tone of growing self-conscious complacency he told me that few things escaped his attention, and he was rather used to think them out, and generally from his experience of life and men arrived at the right conclusion.
> . . . . . .
> A great discouragement fell on me. A spiritual drowsiness. Giles' voice was going on complacently; the very voice of the universal hollow conceit. And I was no longer angry with it. There was nothing original, nothing new, startling, informing to expect from the world: no opportunities to find out something about oneself, no wisdom to acquire, no fun to enjoy. Everything was stupid and overrated, even as Captain Giles was. So be it.(23)

Captain Giles's eminently reasonable way of dealing with life--as only an experienced man could--appeared to his young listener to be nothing other than self-conscious complacency. The irony in this is that the narrator knows it was not Captain Giles, but himself who exhibited self-conscious complacency by refusing to believe the world could hold any opportunities or surprises for him. The conclusion Captain Giles so judiciously withheld from the young man was soon discovered, thanks to Giles's earnest, fatherly prompting; the protagonist's realization that all along there had been a command awaiting him at the Harbour Office effectively broke the shell of self-consciousness and complacency in which he had been hiding and made possible not only his becoming captain, but also enabled him to experience those things that rendered him capable of developing that perspective from which he later tells his own story.

Having received his appointment from Captain Ellis, the young captain returned to the Home; significantly, his preparations for departure included a serious reflection on the fundamental change

wrought in his life by the novel responsibility of command:

> Having absolutely nothing to do (for I had not unpacked my things), I sat down on the bed and abandoned myself to the influences of the hour. To the unexpected influences. . . .
>
> And first I wondered at my state of mind. Why was I not more surprised? Why? Here I was, invested with a command in the twinkling of an eye, not in the common course of human affairs, but more as if by enchantment. I ought to have been lost in astonishment. But I wasn't. I was very much like people in fairy tales. Nothing ever astonishes them. When a fully appointed gala coach is produced out of a pumpkin to take her to a ball Cinderella does not exclaim. She gets in quietly and drives away to her high fortune.
>
> Captain Ellis (a fierce sort of fairy) had produced a command out of a drawer almost as unexpectedly as in a fairy tale. But a command is an abstract idea, and it seemed a sort of "lesser marvel" till it flashed upon me that it involved the concrete existence of a ship.(40)

He proceeded to note how this ship had become "an object of responsibility and devotion" and how "like an enchanted princess" she could not come alive before he arrived to set her in motion. Conrad's portrait of how the young captain's mind worked is an apt continuation of the young man's youthful preoccupation with his own emotions, and it introduces the nature of the challenge the concrete existence of that ship posed to his as yet untamed imagination. The fairy tale analogy makes the point that the newly-appointed captain had not yet arrived in the real world. His sudden realization that the new command involved the "concrete existence of a ship" enabled him to begin thinking about the nature of the challenge awaiting him; but he could not know what his new responsibility entailed until he began to exercise it.

The young captain continued his reflection on board the steamer as he made his way to Bangkok; the narrator's appraisal of his state of mind at the time draws together even more clearly the qualities in him that were about to be put to the test:

> Oblivious of my new surroundings I walked the deck, in anxious, deadened abstraction, a commingling of romantic reverie with a very practical survey of my qualifications.

> For the time was approaching for me to behold my command and to prove my worth in the ultimate test of my profession.(48)

It was right, of course, that he should have had some doubt concerning his as yet unproven abilities and that he should have been prone to reverie over the prospect of his new position; but more than that, the test of endurance he was about to undergo required him to exercise his responsibility, despite the very serious doubts he had of his own competence, and to gain a firm control over the demoralizing influences of his own imagination.

Conrad shows the young captain establishing at once a sound working relationship with his crew by having him gently but firmly assert his authority over Mr. Burns, who, out of a strong desire to be promoted to the captaincy, had brought the ship to Bangkok instead of Singapore and thereby unwittingly exposed the crew to deadly tropical diseases. The captain was aware at the outset that his primary responsibility was not merely to establish an intimate relation with his ship, for it was only a vehicle; rather, his most important concern had to be the maintenance of efficiency and well-being in the community of which he had become the appointed head. He knew also a captain's job was a lonely one that would require him to struggle with adversity, and when he began to reflect on the nature of command as he sat in his captain's chair, he gained a powerful and accurate conception of his own relation to his predecessors and to the longstanding tradition of the Service:

> A succession of men had sat in that chair. I became aware of that thought suddenly, vividly, as though each had left a little of himself between the four walls of these ornate bulkheads; as if a sort of composite soul, the soul of command, had whispered suddenly to mine of long days at sea and of anxious moments.

> "You, too!" it seemed to say, "you, too, shall taste of that peace and that unrest in a searching intimacy with your own self—obscure as we were and as supreme in the face of all the winds and all the seas, in an immensity that receives no impress, preserves no memories, and keeps no reckoning of lives."
>
> Deep within the tarnished ormolu frame, in the hot half-light sifted through the awning, I saw my own face propped between my hands. And I stared back at myself with the perfect detachment of distance, rather with curiosity than with any other feeling, except of some sympathy for this latest representative of what for all intents and purposes was a dynasty; continuous not in blood, but in its experience, in its training, in its conception of duty, and in the blessed simplicity of its traditional point of view on life.(52-53)

This is clearly not a romantic reverie, but a preeminently controlled expression by the narrator of how he felt then about the nature of command; the statement he offers about the simplicity of the Service's "traditional point of view" is indeed far removed from the opinion held by the young captain at the beginning of "The Secret Sharer" when he claimed the Merchant Service offered an "untempted life presenting no disquieting problems"(96). The captain here knew that along with the peace there is always unrest and that even though he was supreme on his ship, he had no power over the immense oceans across which he sailed. Having him look into the mirror dramatizes the act of self-communion; Conrad does this not to show his protagonist indulging in Narcissism, but gaining rather a balanced conception of his own worth and responsibility.

When he discovered from Burns how thoroughly his immediate predecessor had violated the traditions of the Service and malevolently abused his crew, he was outraged and called it treason; he explained the man's behavior by reflecting that "even at sea a man could become the victim of evil spirits"(62). Although Burns's delirium led him later to believe that the deceased captain still maintained a diabolical control over the ship and that his spirit

guarded the location of his burial and blocked the ship's passage out of the Gulf of Siam, the evil spirits that threatened to demoralize the new captain were imaginary, not supernatural.[7] That is not to say such spirits did not exist; on the contrary, they existed almost too powerfully in the captain's mind and caused him occasionally to go very near the brink of insanity. But, in a brilliantly and characteristically Conradian fashion, it was his dedication to the traditions of the Service that kept him from the brink: "The seaman's instinct alone," he says, "survived whole in my moral dissolution"(109).

The narrator offers this account of what it was he experienced:

> For myself, neither my soul was highly tempered, nor my imagination properly under control. There were moments when I felt, not only that I would go mad, but that I had gone mad already; so that I dared not open my lips for fear of betraying myself by some insane shriek. Luckily I had only orders to give, and an order has a steadying influence upon him who has to give it. Moreover, the seaman, the officer of the watch, in me was sufficiently sane. I was like a mad carpenter making a box. Were he ever so convinced he was King of Jerusalem, the box he would make would be a sane box.(100-01)

Having been through the experiences he relates, he knows now the salutary effect of established routine and dedication to tradition when demoralization threatens. His own spirit, he now realizes, was vulnerable because he lacked experience and because he had not yet learned to control his imagination adequately. And Conrad presents ample evidence of the young captain's imagination gaining ascendancy: his imagining the men slowly dying and the ship aimlessly drifting for want of a crew strong enough or determined enough to guide her (103); his construing Ransome's coming to announce the impending storm as a sign someone has died (107); his seeing Burns about to slit his own throat when he was in fact merely trimming his beard (90). The most dramatic presentation of his unwieldy imagination at work occurs

during the downpour when, after weeks of living under a continuous, heavy strain, the captain, unable because of the density of the rain to rely on any of his senses but touch, stumbled over Mr. Burns's crouching body and, in horror, imagined it to be first a dog, then a sheep, and finally a bear (115). The same man who had earlier censured Captain Giles for being unimaginative now realizes that imagination posed a very real threat to his capacity for carrying out the responsibilities of his first command.

The captain's inexperience is perhaps most evident in his belief first that the fresh sea air would drive the disease from the ship, and later in his total reliance on the quinine to cure the ship's ills. The doctor in Bangkok knew the former to be wishful thinking, as he noted in the letter he left in the medicine chest, and the facts proved him right. The captain's reliance on the quinine, however, was only partially supported by the doctor's professional opinion; the captain depended so heavily on the quinine that he came to believe it could, "like a magic powder"(88), cure both the physical and moral ills that had been plaguing his first command. His discovery that he had no more quinine was therefore all the more significant, since it made him painfully aware of his failure to rely on himself to provide moral leadership, as it was his responsibility to do. His immediate reaction to the discovery, however, was not to moan and whimper; rather, he instinctively went up on deck and, after considering how to meet the problem, decided to publicize his finding to the ailing crew. Conrad's presentation of the captain's decision to take this step is a particularly perceptive account of the captain's conquering despair and indifference and gaining a sense of self-satisfaction and confidence by means of a simple, spontaneous exercising of his respon-

sibility. It begins when, after hearing Burns's explanation of what might have happened to the quinine, he came up on deck and addressed the man at the helm:

> "You are not fit to be here."
> "I can manage sir," he said feebly.
> As a matter of fact, there was nothing for him to do. The ship had no steerage way. She lay with her head to the westward, the everlasting Koh-ring visible over the stern, with a few small islets, black spots in the great blaze, swimming before my troubled eyes. And but for those bits of land there was no speck on the sky, no speck on the water, no shape of vapour, no sign of life, nothing!
> The first question was, what to do? What could one do? The first thing obviously was to tell the men. I did it that very day. I wasn't going to let the knowledge simply get about. I would face them. They were assembled on the quarter-deck for the purpose. Just before I stepped out to speak for them I discovered that life could hold terrible moments. No confessed criminal had ever been so oppressed by his sense of guilt. This is why, perhaps, my face was set hard and my voice curt and unemotional while I made my declaration that I could do nothing more for the sick, in the way of drugs. As to such care as could be given them they knew they had had it.
> I would have held them justified in tearing me limb from limb. The silence which followed upon my words was almost harder to bear than the angriest uproar. I was crushed by the infinite depth of its reproach. But, as a matter of fact, I was mistaken.
> . . . . . .
> They had kept silent simply because they thought that they were not called to say anything; and when I told them that I intended to run into Singapore and that the best chance for the ship and the men was in the efforts all of us, sick and well, must make to get her along out of this, I received the encouragement of a low assenting murmur and of a louder voice exclaiming, "Surely there is a way out of this blamed hole."(95-97)

The moral vacancy the captain so strongly felt at this time is effectively mirrored in what he saw around him: the helmsman was incapable of doing anything, the ship was inert and aimless, and even the view of the sea was characterized more by what it lacked than by what it positively was. But this is not done for mere aesthetic purposes. The relationship between the emptiness around him and his own moral emptiness was one of cause and effect: the

inability to move the ship was why there was nothing for the captain to do and why he felt so helpless. His instinctive reaction to the situation, partly a result of his training and partly of his commitment to life, was clearly a moral one. He did not imagine here that there were evil spirits bewitching his first command, nor did he indulge in self-pity: he considered rationally what he ought to do and then proceeded to do it. Furthermore, the course of action he decided to take was itself an expression of his total commitment to the community that had been placed in his charge. He imagined the crew's silence at first to be a tacit confirmation of his own feeling of inadequacy, but once he understood how they felt about the situation, he took heart and realized he had done the right thing.

The calm and the disease, however, plagued the ship for many more days, and the emptiness, in time, succeeded in wearing down even the captain's resolve to meet the problems of the ship on deck, in public. On two occasions the captain wrote in his notebook, venting his frustration over not being able to do anything to help the ship; the first occasion came just after he had told the crew about the quinine, and the excerpt the narrator presents shows how, although he was downcast because there was no prospect of relief, he was firm in his determination to remain on deck. The second excerpt, however, demonstrates that the continuous presence of his unrelenting difficulties had destroyed in him even that instinctive determination; but although his moral strength was perhaps then at its lowest ebb, he retained sufficient self-possession at least to condemn himself for his failure:

> It's like being bound hand and foot preparatory to having one's throat cut. And what appals [sic] me most of all is that I shrink from going on deck to face it. It's due to

> the ship, it's due to the men who are there on deck—some of them, ready to put out the last remnant of their strength at a word from me. And I am shrinking from it. From the mere vision. My first command. Now I understand that strange sense of insecurity in my past. I always suspected that I might be no good. And here is proof positive, I am shirking it, I am no good.(107)

Ransome entered just as he had finished writing these words and prevented the captain from languishing too long in destructive self-condemnation. Ransome's very presence was sufficient to reawaken in him his seaman's instinct and his commitment to life and motivated him to translate judgment into action; the captain impulsively asked, "'You think I ought to be on deck?'" and once he had received the expected reply, proceeded to get up and go on deck.

That it should have been Ransome who reawakened his seaman's instinct is vitally significant: Ransome was the quintessential seaman who embodied the instinctive life-sense that makes creative response possible. Ransome served first as cook, and when the steward was lost to the fever, he took on double duty, something that was all the more taxing because it soon came to involve attending to the sick crewmen. As if this had not been enough to do for a man with a dangerously weak heart, Ransome instinctively assumed other roles and performed other tasks as the situation required: sometimes he was helmsman, sometimes he assisted the captain in furling the sails. Consider how he is introduced into the tale:

> Ransome was the cook. The mate had pointed him out to me the first day, standing on the deck, his arms crossed on his broad chest, gazing on the river.
>
> Even at a distance his well-proportioned figure, something thoroughly sailor-like in his poise, made him noticeable. On nearer view the intelligent, quiet eyes, a well-bred face, the disciplined independence of his manner made up an attractive personality. When, in addition, Mr. Burns told me that he was the best seaman in the ship, I expressed my surprise that in his earliest prime and of such appearance

> he should sign on as cook on board a ship.
> "It's his heart," Mr. Burns had said. "There's something wrong with it. He mustn't exert himself too much or he may drop dead suddenly."
> And he was the only one the climate had not touched—perhaps because, carrying a deadly enemy in his breast, he had schooled himself into a systematic control of feelings and movements. When one was in the secret this was apparent in his manner. After the poor steward died, and as he could not be replaced by a white man in this Oriental port, Ransome volunteered to do the double work.(67-68)

Ransome's thoroughly sailor-like sensibility was the epitome of proportion, good breeding, discipline, and self-control. It is indeed appropriate that such a nearly perfect specimen of sailor nature should have borne conspicuously within him as his only flaw the bad heart that came to represent for the captain the ever-present threat of death that faces every man. The most significant aspect of Ransome's self-discipline involved control of his own feelings and actions, and it was just such control his young captain learned during his first command, largely by virtue of Ransome's example. This strict discipline was what enabled Ransome to keep himself alive; and even when he relaxed his control over his exertions to dedicate himself to a higher purpose, he still conducted himself with exemplary poise and discipline.

Ransome's strict self-control and the willingness for self-sacrifice concomitant with it are in evidence throughout, but nowhere are they more perceptively presented than in the narrator's account of himself and Ransome preparing to anchor the ship in the roadstead outside Singapore harbour:

> Ransome and I rushed along the decks letting go all the sheets and halyards by the run. We dashed up on to the forecastle head. The perspiration of labour and sheer nervousness simply poured off our heads as we toiled to get the anchors cockbilled. I dared not look at Ransome as we worked side by side. We exchanged curt words; I could hear him panting close to me and I avoided turning my

> eyes his way for fear of seeing him fall down and expire in the act of putting out his strength—for what? Indeed for some distinct ideal.
>
> The consummate seaman in him was aroused. He needed no directions. He knew what to do. Every effort, every movement, was an act of consistent heroism. It was not for me to look at a man thus inspired.(125)

In Ransome, such exertion expressed his readiness to sacrifice his own life for the community. Yet Ransome was no suicidal masochist: he was thoroughly dedicated to his calling and the work he did was the natural result of his training. The inspiration that drove him to perform such actions shone forth as an unrelenting will to live, and that will to live was all the more admirable in that it challenged so courageously the threat of sudden death.

The extent of Ransome's love for life is dramatized at the tale's end where Ransome asked to be paid off and relieved of his berth. Although the captain had been fearing all along that Ransome's exertions would kill him, he seemed all too willing, now the ship's crisis had passed, to forget that Ransome had to face the physical consequences of exerting himself so strenuously. The captain had been so impressed by Ransome's consummate dedication to his seamanship that he temporarily forgot how precarious Ransome's hold on life was:

> "But, Ransome," I said, "I hate the idea of parting with you."
>
> "I must go," he broke in. "I have a right!" He gasped and a look of almost savage determination passed over his face. For an instant he was another being. And I saw under the worth and the comeliness of the man the humble reality of things. Life was a boon to him—this precarious hard life—and he was thoroughly alarmed about himself.(129)

Ransome had no illusions about his own condition and was painfully aware of what was necessary for him to do now if he expected to remain alive. Life was clearly a boon to him: he acted to ensure he did not lose it, even if that meant giving up the Service.

The importance of Ransome's presence to the young captain's developing his own self-possession and struggling for his own wisdom is underscored by the fact that it is Ransome's departure from the ship that closes the tale:

> "Won't you shake hands, Ransome?" I said gently.
> He exclaimed, flushed up dusky red, gave my hand a hard wrench—and next moment, left alone in the cabin, I listened to him going up the companion stairs cautiously, step by step, in mortal fear of starting into sudden anger our common enemy it was his hard fate to carry consciously within his faithful breast.(133)

The narrator fully understands now how the service of life involves one continuously with the threat of death, and he realizes too how Ransome's intense dedication to the Service and his carrying that deadly menace in his breast indeed have made Ransome the quintessential seaman.

Less careful treatment could easily have made Ransome a mere phantom with a symbol instead of a heart. The heart indeed is a symbol, but it is first a heart: what significance it has results from Ransome's being a man, and his humanity expresses itself most emphatically in his discipline and his total dedication to the British Merchant Service and to life. There is no adjectival glamorizing or sentimentalizing involved in the presentation of Ransome, as might have occurred if a lesser novelist had attempted to present him, or as Conrad himself might have done if he had not been in full control of his own talents. Conrad expresses by the controlled manner of his writing in this tale that his narrator's perspective on Ransome, and on all these other elements of the experience he relates, is not a pose, but a highly valued and strongly cherished way of life that Conrad himself learned in the Merchant Service and tempered with many years' experience both as a seaman and as a writer. He knows full well the truth of Captain Giles's remark that "one must not make too much of anything in life,

good or bad"(131), and in his presentation of Ransome he does not make too much of Ransome's weak heart or of his intense devotion to duty. The feeling he and the narrator express toward Ransome is that which is due him as the consummate seaman he was: "the man positively had grace"(73).

By the end of his ordeal, the young captain had learned not to make too much of his own failings. He knew that although those failings had to be acknowledged, the only way to conquer them was to act. He knew this partly from Ransome's example and partly from his own experience, and as narrator of the tale he realizes that developing the knack of doing the right thing at the right time is a necessary goal for every seaman, a goal that can only be achieved through action. When he decided to proceed on his voyage after only one night of rest in Singapore, he proved he had also learned not to gloat over his successes, but to go on trying to do his best. He knew then, and he knows now how true is Captain Giles's comment:

> "A man should stand up to his bad luck, to his mistakes, to his conscience, and all that sort of thing. Why—what else would you have to fight against?"(131-32)

for by accepting his bad luck and acknowledging his mistakes he has been able to leave behind him the time when his feelings and his imagination ruled over him and to establish that wisdom of complete self-possession he saw exemplified in Ransome and in Captain Giles.

VI

"The Secret Sharer":

A Case of Mistaken Identity

As in Victory, impulse plays a central role in "The Secret Sharer": Leggatt impulsively sets the Sephora's reefed foresail at the crucial moment and then kills a recalcitrant crewman; the captain-narrator impulsively offers Leggatt sanctuary in his quarters. But in this tale Conrad fails to justify the impulsiveness. He does not submit these impulsive actions to the scrutiny of his own moral judgment, and he lapses into the error of making impulse appear morally directed even though such direction is lacking.

It would be wrong to assert that Conrad's aims in this story are immoral or ill-conceived; rather, they are dishonestly executed. In what is probably the best commentary on the story published in recent years, H. M. Daleski considers the high value Conrad places on self-possession generally and argues that this tale is a dramatization of how impulse is an essential element of genuine self-possession. He refers, among other things in Conrad, to the following passage from the "Familiar Preface" to A Personal Record where Conrad comments on the need to "surrender oneself to occult and irresponsible powers" in order to be a "great magician":

> I don't lay claim to particular wisdom because of my dislike and distrust of such transactions. It may be my sea training acting upon a natural disposition to keep good hold on the one thing really mine, but the fact is I have a positive horror of losing even for one moving moment that full possession of myself which is the first condition of good service. And I have carried my notion of good service from my earlier into my later existence.(xvii)

Daleski proceeds to show that Leggatt's killing of the crewman occurs

when Leggatt does not have control of himself; in fact, Leggatt comments that, after the crew found him still gripping the corpse's neck, "'The first thing I heard <u>when I came to myself</u> was the maddening howling of that endless gale'"(103)[my italics]. Daleski concludes:

> If self-possession, indeed may be seen as Conrad's obsessive preoccupation, it is striking that the obsession should manifest itself in his work in repeated depictions of loss of self; and what his art finally insists on—'The Secret Sharer' being a vivid instance of this—is that true self-possession is based on a capacity for abandon.[1]

There are dangerous implications inherent in the principle of self-possession so described, and Daleski acknowledges this when he says Leggatt's claiming the man he killed did not deserve to live "smacks disquietingly of the Professor's final solution for the halt and the lame in <u>The Secret Agent</u>."[2] Even more disturbing is that neither the captain who offers Leggatt sanctuary, nor Conrad, engages himself in considering whether Leggatt acted rightly: the story ignores the dangers of its claim that some men should be empowered to judge who shall live and who shall not. Certainly, this tale is written in Conrad's plainest style, but it also exhibits in highly concentrated doses Conrad's most damaging propensities: a wrenching out of "profound" emotional effects and a sacrificing of truth to spectacle, both of which are evident in <u>Heart of Darkness</u> and <u>Victory</u>. These are the techniques employed to convey the impression that the captain's and Leggatt's impulsive actions are justified and that they defy morality, though reinforcing it on a higher plane. In fact, Leggatt's killing and the captain's harboring him are dangerously subversive of morality.

The principle of self-possession based on a capacity for abandon is certainly at the heart of "The Secret Sharer," but Conrad's attempt

to realize this theme in his fictional reworking of the Cutty Sark episode falsifies that very theme. Conrad could have presented a case for Leggatt that would have justified the killing, but he chose instead to support Leggatt's act only by Leggatt's own sense of responsibility and his good training, and he chose as narrator a man who, for psychological reasons, is totally incapable of judging.

F. R. Leavis claims that this tale is "a very fine thing, a work of genius":[3]

> What the young captain is confronted with when he discovers the swimmer holding on to the rope ladder is something to which, he recognizes at once, a conventional response is out of place. A Conway boy, he recognizes in the fugitive—in his speech and bearing—a man of courage, fortitude, and complete moral responsibility. And in defiance of what is conventionally expected of a ship's master, he acts on his full human judgment. A man's supreme obligation is to recognize his own moral responsibility—to have the courage to recognize it and to act on it. There is no hesitation about the young captain's response to what he perceives; it is immediate and unqualified. You might say that he reacts by higher reflex.[4]

There is no question that Leggatt appears to be a good man and that the captain's judgment of his character from this appearance is an accurate one, as far as it goes. But appearances are often deceiving: evil men can make themselves appear good, and good men can sometimes do evil. The captain assesses Leggatt's character on the basis of how Leggatt speaks and what he looks like, and if that assessment is accurate, it should hold up under the weight of Leggatt's actions. Character references are valuable, but they are suspect if not supported by performance.

Leggatt's most significant acts are his saving the Sephora at a time when disaster seemed imminent and his subsequent killing of the crewman who "'wouldn't do his duty and wouldn't let anybody else do theirs'"(101). The former is clearly an act of "courage, fortitude and

complete moral responsibility," but the latter is at least questionable. The captain, however, does not question the correctness of that killing. In fact, Conrad's presentation of the captain's relationship with Leggatt shows the captain's judgment to be disabled and projects the illusion that the captain has judged and judged rightly. Consider how he reacts to the revelation that Leggatt has killed someone:

> " . . . I've killed a man."
> "What do you mean? Just now?"
> "No, on the passage. Weeks ago. Thirty-nine south. When I say a man——"
> "Fit of temper," I suggested, confidently.
> The shadowy, dark head, like mine, seemed to nod imperceptibly above the ghostly grey of my sleeping-suit. It was, in the night, as though I had been faced by my own reflection in the depths of a sombre and immense mirror.
> "A pretty thing to have to own up to for a Conway boy," murmured my double, distinctly.
> "You're a Conway boy?"
> "I am," he said, as if startled. Then, slowly . . . "Perhaps you too——"(101)

The captain's immediate response is not an expression of interest in finding out the circumstances of the case, nor one of concern for the seriousness of the deed; rather, he first asserts his astonishment at Leggatt's revelation, and then, before Leggatt can finish his explanation, he "confidently" assumes the whole thing can be excused as a "fit of temper"—as if such a fit could absolve him of responsibility for the deed. The captain's unconcern with the deed's seriousness and his lack of interest in the facts are explained by the intense visual image the captain presents of the fugitive. It is indeed appropriate that the head of a man on board a ship at night should be described as "shadowy" and "dark" and that his sleeping-suit should be "ghostly grey." That his head is shadowy and dark, "like mine", and that he wears "my sleeping-suit" justify the image of Leggatt as "my own reflection" and the conclusion that, <u>visually</u>, he is "my double." But the high drama of the scene and the strong sense of Leggatt as

the captain's mirror-image gloss over the vital moral issue: was Leggatt justified in killing the man?

A short reflective paragraph follows their brief conversation and intensifies the almost hallucinatory illusion that Leggatt is the captain's alter ego and explains why the captain is not interested in or capable of considering Leggatt's case on its own merits:

> He appealed to me as if our experiences had been as identical as our clothes. And I knew well enough the pestiferous danger of such a character where there are no means of legal repression. And I knew well enough also that my double there was no homicidal ruffian. I did not think of asking him for details, and he told me the story roughly in brusque, disconnected sentences. I needed no more. I saw it all going on as though I were myself inside that other sleeping-suit.(102)

It is one thing to listen sympathetically to a man telling of his personal experience; it is quite another to imagine oneself to be the other man. The contrary to fact statement that opens the paragraph is subtly substantiated by the captain's reaction: Leggatt appeals to him "as if our experience had been as identical as **our** clothes," and when the captain hears Leggatt's story he imagines such an identity to have been established. Conrad encourages the reader to accept this illusion as fact and to agree that, in principle, one's own double should not be judged because that would be judging oneself, and to reach a judgment against oneself would clearly be wrong.

But the identity is a false one. Even if they had been identical twins with common upbringing, common training, and common vocation, their identity would be in biological terms only. The irrefutable difference between them is that one has killed and the other has not. By concentrating so pointedly on their similarities in age and training, Conrad attempts to justify his point that Leggatt is not to be held responsible for his action. Leavis says the captain "acts on his full

human judgment," but, later in the story, after hearing Leggatt recount his story twice and after having many days to consider that case, the captain acknowledges: "I had no leisure to weigh the merits of the matter"(125). He admits he has not judged Leggatt, but merely expressed sympathy for him. Furthermore, Conrad, in this story, sees nothing wrong with not "weighing the merits of the matter": he fully approves of the way the captain handles Leggatt, both in his harboring of him and in his later narrating the story.

Leavis insists the captain has judged, even though he clearly has not. Perhaps this insistence results from Leavis's using "The Secret Sharer" as a foil to The Shadow-Line. He wants to see the captain's response to Leggatt as parallel to the situation in that other work where the other captain bows to the entreaties of Mr. Burns even though it means taking an ailing first mate on board a ship already debilitated by disease. The situations are indeed similar, but there are significant differences Leavis overlooks. First, the captain in The Shadow-Line is completely within his authority when he takes Burns aboard, and he indicates that, strong though Burns's entreaties were, he would have left him behind if the doctor had ordered that he not be moved. On the other hand, the captain in this tale exceeds his authority: he clearly places himself above the law when he offers Leggatt sanctuary. More important, there is no illusion that Burns is his captain's alter ego: that relationship is portrayed simply and honestly as one of seaman to seaman. Leavis says of the captain in "The Secret Sharer" that:

> He sees in the double who killed a man an alter ego. 'It might very well have been myself who had done it'—that is his attitude. He doesn't mean humbly that he might have been guilty; there's no question of guilt by the ultimate criterion that's invoked in Conrad's art. By which I don't

> mean that the spirit of it is Jenseits von Gut und Böse. On the contrary, there is an insistence on the inescapable need for individual moral judgment, and for moral conviction that is strong and courageous enough to forget codes and to defy law and codified morality and justice.[5]

Such commentary would be totally inappropriate to The Shadow-Line. The captain there is not deluded into believing it could just as easily have been he, with a wife and child, laid low by the fever; his response to Burns is the confident response of one man to another, not, as here, the response of one man to an image of himself. And the "insistence on the inescapable need for individual moral judgment" comes from Leavis, not from "The Secret Sharer."

Albert J. Guerard, Jr., holds a view of the story directly opposed to Leavis's. He claims that psychology, not morality, is the essence of the tale. He says that "In broad terms 'The Secret Sharer' concerns the classic night journey and willed descent into the unconscious."[6] He considers the captain's impulsive identification with Leggatt and asks, "What does this unreflective and immediate sympathy for a 'double' mean but sympathy for one's second, irrational self?"[7] Much thpugh it might be wished that the significance of the double were moral, it is indeed all too powerfully psychological. But it would be wrong to accept Guerard's psychological analysis, for it reveals far more about Guerard than it does about Conrad. Perhaps this is his most self-revealing comment:

> It is entirely wrong to suppose, as some readers do, that Conrad unequivocally approves the captain's decision to harbor Leggatt. The reasons for the narrator's act are defined as "psychological (not moral)." Who knows what Conrad the responsible master-mariner might not have done, had he so connived in a fugitive's escape? The excellent captain of the Cutty Sark committed suicide four days after letting Leggatt's prototype go free.[8]

The point, however, is not whether Conrad, if he had been involved, as

a captain, in a situation like the one portrayed in this story, would have acted as his protagonist does, and for Guerard to fall back on his necessary ignorance of this hypothetical case is to beg the question. The fact is that Conrad's writing "The Secret Sharer" is his way of approving the captain's decision, and if he had not intended to approve that decision, either he should have written the story in such a way as to show it to be wrong or he should not have written the story at all. Guerard poses the question, "Who knows what Conrad . . . might not have done [?]" to suggest there is no question of morality involved here. Conrad, he implies, indicates that what the captain does would not necessarily have been proper for Conrad or for anyone else, but it was proper for the captain because of his psychological make-up. By the same reasoning he could claim that Jack the Ripper's cold-blooded mutilation of his innocent victims was neither right nor wrong, but merely proper to his personality. Surely moral considerations are possible and necessary if men are to be able to live together, be it on board a ship or in a modern state; and since, as Conrad affirms so unequivocally elsewhere, life can only be lived in collaboration with others, to be satisfied with the conclusion that the captain's decision is a correct expression of his personality is to deny the possibility of such collaboration.

It could be claimed that Guerard takes the phrase out of context when he says, "The reasons for the narrator's act are defined as 'psychological (not moral),'" but that would be mere nit-picking. The phrase occurs in the passage where the captain analyses the pose he adopts to receive Archbold, and it is his expression of the reasons why he could not have lied directly about Leggatt's presence on board: to use this phrase to explain why the captain decides to harbor

Leggatt requires the point to be stretched only slightly. The context of this phrase, however, deserves further study, for it helps explain how Conrad succeeds in sidestepping the moral issues involved in the story by asserting profound psychological effects:

> And yet how else could I have received him? Not heartily! That was impossible for psychological reasons, which I need not state here. My only object was to keep off his inquiries. Surlily? Yes, but surliness might have provoked a point-blank question. From its novelty to him and from its nature, punctilious courtesy was the manner best calculated to restrain the man. But there was the danger of his breaking through my defence bluntly. I could not, I think, have met him by a direct lie, also for psychological (not moral) reasons. If he had only known how afraid I was of his putting my feeling of identity with the other to the test!(120)

The "psychological reasons" he twice refers to are the reasons for his feeling of identity with Leggatt, which, although asserted quite powerfully and dramatically, do not bear investigation. When the captain remarks that he "need not state here" what the psychological reasons are, he is referring to the reader's knowledge of his identity with Leggatt, which could hardly have been forgotten. Such a reference, however, merely offers an explanation of how he feels and only pretends to show why he feels that way: the drama of their first meeting, their immediate identification and their continuing secret rapport are presented so as to appear self-justifying. Conrad neglects to consider why the feeling of identity is so strong or whether such feeling is justified, but the intense drama of the story and the powerful image of Leggatt's being the captain's reflection make it seem as though the feeling were right and true.

Conrad's procedure here is in some respects like that photo-journalistic technique of which Life magazine offered the starkest example. The basic procedure in Life was to provide a minimum of verbal and a maximum of pictorial content; the captions or brief

stories were not based on rational argument, but relied, rather, on the photographs to which they were appended for their support. The magazine thereby presented news items in its photographs to make the reader believe he was witnessing news without the interfering distortions of an intermediary. In this context the editorial remarks were made to seem as if they, too, were objective fact, since they apparently partook of the truth captured in the adjoining photographs. These remarks were sometimes accurate and sometimes not, but the entire technique is suspect: besides offering powerful support for questionable commentary it also tended to cut the reader off from important considerations. For example, the magazine could present a photograph of a young child weeping over the bodies of his parents, the victims of a communist mortar attack on a Vietnamese village; the magazine could use the photojournalist's technique to point to the inhuman cruelty of the communist forces or even to show that such agony and carnage are inevitable concomitants of warfare. It would not, however, be faithful to its medium if it were to go on to question the justice of such a war or if it were to investigate the ideological causes or the motivation behind the war. Photojournalism is interested in the spectacular side of news, and Life magazine, by developing this interest, made it seem as if viewing spectacles was the best way of comprehending what was important in life. In "The Secret Sharer," Conrad employs the powers of the spectacle in a similar way: he makes his reader the witness of the captain's looking at Leggatt as if he were peering into "the depths of a sombre and immense mirror"(101). Just as deftly as if he had published a picture of this event, Conrad asserts the identity of the two men, but in so doing he avoids the necessity of considering whether the captain was right to imagine Leggatt to be his double.

The rapport is thus established as fact, and Conrad, by means of this dubious proceeding, has made questions about the morality of the event and its consequences seem irrelevant and unnecessary.

The point can perhaps be understood more fully by examining another passage, where Conrad does not rely on the feeling of identity, but on the necessity for secrecy. This passage occurs when, after leaving Leggatt alone in his quarters, the captain presides for the first time over the business of getting his ship under way:

> This is not the place to enlarge upon the sensations of a man who feels for the first time a ship move under his feet to his own independent word. In my case they were not unalloyed. I was not wholly alone with my command; for there was that stranger in my cabin. Or rather, I was not completely and wholly with her. Part of me was absent. That mental feeling of being in two places at once affected me physically as if the mood of secrecy had penetrated my very soul. Before an hour had elapsed since the ship had begun to move, having occasion to ask the mate (he stood by my side) to take a compass bearing of the Pagoda, I caught myself reaching up to his ear in whispers. I say I caught myself, but enough had escaped to startle the man. I can't describe it otherwise than by saying that he shied. A grave, preoccupied manner, as though he were in possession of some perplexing intelligence, did not leave him henceforth. A little later I moved away from the rail to look at the compass with such a stealthy gait that the helmsman noticed it—and I could not help noticing the unusual roundness of his eyes. These are trifling instances, though it's to no commander's advantage to be suspected of ludicrous eccentricities. But I was also more seriously affected. There are to a seaman certain words, gestures, that should in given conditions come as naturally, as instinctively as the winking of a menaced eye. A certain order should spring on to his lips without thinking; a certain sign should get itself made, so to speak, without reflection. But all unconscious alertness had abandoned me. I had to make an effort of will to recall myself back (from the cabin) to the conditions of the moment. I felt that I was appearing an irresolute commander to those people who were watching me more or less critically.(126)

The power of the captain's feeling of rapport with Leggatt of course pervades the entire story, but this passage shows a situation in which it is not necessary to evoke that feeling to explain certain of the captain's actions. The passage effectively presents the captain's

extreme difficulty in keeping his two lives separate; it makes clear that because of the necessity for secrecy, the captain cannot devote his full attention to his responsibilities for the ship, and therefore he is divided between two tasks and feels as if he is in two places at once. When he comments that "Part of me was absent," the reader does not need to imagine that one of his embodiments is on deck and the other in his cabin; rather, the captain is expressing the division of his attention in the appropriate spatial terms: his secret harboring of Leggatt is strongly associated with the place where that secret is being kept and his exercising of command is appropriate to the deck. He proceeds to explain that because of his obligation of keeping Leggatt's presence secret once he has begun to do so he does not feel wholly with his command: "That feeling of being in two places at once affected me physically as if the mood of secrecy had penetrated my very soul." The secrecy, not some unfathomable psychological phenomenon, causes him to whisper to the mate and to walk stealthily toward the compass. And when he mentions how his "unconscious alertness" is gone, he shows how this fact results from the "mood of secrecy": "I had," he says, "to make an effort of will to recall myself back (from the cabin) to the conditions of the moment." The psychological effects of the secrecy on the captain are numerous and powerful, but they are effects none the less. Conrad's portrait of the secrecy's affecting what the captain says and does here shows not only how the captain feels and thinks, but justifies the way he feels and thinks by presenting the cause in dynamic relation to its effects. Given the fact that Leggatt is being kept secretly in the captain's cabin, the secrecy alone is needed to show why the captain loses the knack of behaving on deck as a responsible seaman. In order

to understand the human mind, one must certainly do more than elaborate on psychological effects; rather, one must investigate the causes, as Conrad does here.

Unfortunately, Conrad's account of the identity established between Leggatt and the captain asserts psychological effects as if they were causes. The feeling of identity could have been justified if Leggatt and the captain had had similar experiences, but the fact of Leggatt's having killed a man makes them very different indeed. Conrad shows the captain being unsure of himself, imagining that because he and Leggatt are so alike, their wearing the same sleeping suits, their sharing the same cabin, and their keeping the same secret somehow render them identical. When the captain wonders, early in the tale, "how far I should turn out faithful to that ideal conception of one's personality every man sets up for himself secretly," he suggests that his feeling for Leggatt is justified by a predisposition in him for meeting his own ideal self. The sentence leads up to that final emphatic "secretly" very effectively and helps convey the impression that Leggatt is indeed the captain's ideal conception of himself, or at least the reality undermining the possibility of achieving that ideal, because he, too, must be kept in secret. And since "secret" is a key word in the title, that impression is made very strong indeed. This predisposition makes the identity and the accompanying feeling appropriate, but it does not make them right.

Conrad, it seems, is too caught up in the emotions of the events he portrays in "The Secret Sharer" to gain and express a full understanding of those events and emotions. He successfully presents the impact of the secrecy on the captain's behavior, at least in one scene, but he only presents the psychology behind keeping the secret

in the first place, without attempting to judge what the captain does. Conrad avoids considering whether the captain is right to believe that the mitigating circumstances of Leggatt's act outweigh the crime, although he does make it appropriate that the captain should react to Leggatt as he does. Furthermore, to make the captain's harboring a fugitive from justice more palatable, he presents Leggatt's setting of the saving foresail so as to make it appear that the killing is its necessary concomitant, even though it is not, and he renders distasteful, through his portrait of Archbold, the only alternative response the captain could have made to his learning of Leggatt's deed.

Leggatt gives two accounts of what happened on the Sephora during that critical period: the first comes immediately after the rapport has been established, and it portrays the killing in the most graphic terms; the second comes after Archbold's visit and emphasizes, rather, Archbold's demoralization during the storm and, by way of contrast, Leggatt's assertiveness and responsibility during the crisis. Here is that first account:

> "It happened while we were setting a reefed foresail, at dusk. Reefed foresail! You understand the sort of weather. The only sail we had left to keep the ship running; so you may guess what it had been like for days. Anxious sort of job, that. He gave me some of his cursed insolence at the sheet. I tell you I was overdone with this terrific weather that seemed to have no end to it. Terrific, I tell you—and a deep ship. I believe the fellow himself was half crazed with funk. It was no time for gentlemanly reproof, so I turned round and felled him like an ox. He up and at me. We closed just as an awful sea made for the ship. All hands saw it coming and took to the rigging, but I had him by the throat, and went on shaking him like a rat, the men above us yelling, "Look out! look out!" Then a crash as if the sky had fallen on my head. They say that for over ten minutes hardly anything was to be seen of the ship—just the three masts and a bit of the forecastle head and of the poop all awash driving along in a smother of foam. It was a miracle that they found us, jammed together behind the forebits.

> It's clear I meant business, because I was holding him by the throat still when they picked us up. He was black in the face. It was too much for them. It seems they rushed us aft together, gripped as we were, screaming 'Murder!' like a lot of lunatics, and broke into the cuddy."(102-03)

By saying it happened while setting the reefed foresail, Leggatt indicates that his victim was interfering with action necessary to save the ship. Yet it is clear from what Archbold says and from Leggatt's second account that the foresail did get set in spite of Leggatt's having to take time out to kill the man. It seems, then, that the foresail is already set when the man is killed. The captain recognizes this point later when he explains Leggatt's action: "The same strung-up force which had given twenty-four men a chance, at least, for their lives, had, in a sort of recoil, crushed an unworthy mutinous existence"(124-25). The captain's statement here implies that because this strung-up force saved the ship, its role in killing the man is justified, even though there is no necessary connection between the two acts.

The paragraph preceding the above passage (quoted on page 127) has a great deal to do with how the reader receives Leggatt's account, for in addition to reinforcing the illusion of identity between Leggatt and the captain, it suggests there is no alternate course of action for Leggatt to have taken with the man he kills. "I knew well enough," says the captain, "the pestiferous danger of such a character where there are no means of legal repression"(102). The captain believes the only way such a man could be handled was by illegal means: the Sephora's captain, he implies, was incapable of maintaining discipline on board his ship, and therefore Leggatt, as first officer, had to take the matter into his own hands. There is, however, no evidence that Archbold was lax in enforcing the law on board his ship; indeed, the

principal fact of his character is his "tenacity" in matters of law. Nor is there anything to support Leggatt's belief—corroborated though it is by the captain and by Conrad—that the victim was one of those "Miserable devils that have no business to live at all"(101). This is not to say that there are no such people, nor that the man Leggatt killed was not one of them; the point is, rather, that this judgment comes from a man who may be trying to describe his own actions in a more favorable light than they deserve, and that the captain, who is Conrad's spokesman in the tale, is not capable of disagreeing with Leggatt.

The intense drama of the scene on board the Sephora appears to justify what Leggatt did and to show that because Leggatt was so strung-up by the pressures of the situation, his killing the man was a natural and a proper course of action; the drama of the scene in the captain's cabin, where the account is given, makes it seem that the captain has no alternative but to offer Leggatt sanctuary. Both men's actions are presented with the dramatic force of accomplished facts: these events happened and are presented so vividly so as to appear to be right. But no matter how Conrad tries to diminish the seriousness of Leggatt's deed, it is still a brutal killing, and it violates not only British law, but the best traditions of the British Merchant Service and the traditional moral standards of Christian civilization. And, mitigating circumstances or no, the captain's harboring Leggatt makes the captain an accomplice.

One would do well at this point to recall the scene from The Shadow-Line where, after discovering that the steward had kept secret from him the possibility of a command waiting for him at the Harbour Office, the young protagonist says of the steward, "He doesn't seem

very fit to live"(39). But Captain Giles, who has only just returned from comforting the steward so as to avert the possibility of a suicide attempt, replies:

> "As to that, it may be said of a good many. . . .
> "He's not a bad steward, really. He can find a good cook, at any rate. And, what's more, he can keep him when found. I remember the cooks we had here before his time. . . ."(39)

The intensity of this scene in The Shadow-Line results from Conrad's presentation of Captain Giles's wisdom undercutting the young protagonist's inflated ego. It is possible that wisdom such as Captain Giles's could have seen some reason for defending the right to life for Leggatt's victim; however, no evidence is presented to contradict Leggatt's claim that the man had no business being alive, and so it would be distorting the case to speculate whether the dead man did have any redeeming qualities. But Conrad presents no evidence against which Leggatt's judgment can be evaluated. This leaves the reader with a judgment by Leggatt that is supported wholly by Leggatt's own ethos. This scene from The Shadow-Line, however, shows Leggatt's judgment originates in an ego disturbingly close to that of that tale's immature captain, from whom a similar judgment arises—a fact neither Conrad nor the narrator of "The Secret Sharer" seem to be aware of. A significant difference between the two cases is that the scene from The Shadow-Line presents an argument regarding the relative worth of two different worlds, one with the steward in it, the other without. "The Secret Sharer," though fraught with rhetorical power, does not present an argument: it is concerned, in this matter, with justifying an irreversible act, and it attempts to do so by supporting the illusion that since this act has been performed, it is the only possible course of action that could have been taken. Such a procedure explains how

and why the killing happened, but fails to show that it was inevitable or that it ought to have happened. The Shadow-Line lacks the dramatic, visual power of "The Secret Sharer" in its consideration of this matter; Conrad could easily have had the steward commit suicide, but instead of beguiling his reader with that spectacle, he chooses the philosophical course and achieves thereby a balanced and accurate judgment of the steward.

To have handed Leggatt over to the authorities might have been appropriate for Captain Giles if he had found himself in the position of this tale's young captain, but even though this is the only alternate course of action the captain here could have taken, Conrad's presentation of Archbold, the man who is dedicated to so doing, ensures that such an alternative does not receive serious consideration. In Leggatt's second account, Archbold is shown to be less competent for command of the Sephora than is his first mate:

> "He stood there with me on the break of the poop after the maintopsail blew away, and whimpered about our last hope—positively whimpered about it and nothing else—and the night coming on! To hear one's skipper go on like that in such weather was enough to drive any fellow out of his mind. It worked me up into a sort of desperation. I just took it into my own hands and went away from him, boiling, and—But what's the use telling you? You know! . . ." (124)

The spectacle of Archbold whimpering at the critical moment is a powerful one indeed, and it renders plausible the captain's negative assessment of Archbold when he meets him in person. But Archbold's failure to assert his responsibility here does not mean that he is also failing his responsibility when he perseveres in trying to turn Leggatt over to the authorities; it does, however, cause the reader to believe the captain asserts his own responsibility rightly when he refuses to do what Archbold attempts. Archbold's tenacity in the matter is therefore termed a "spiritless tenacity"(116), and such an assessment appears

correct in view of his demoralization during the storm. But consider how this way of viewing Archbold distorts the moral issues involved:

> "You were very anxious to give up your mate to the shore people, I believe?"
>
> He was. To the law. His obscure tenacity on that point had in it something incomprehensible and a little awful; something, as it were, mystical, quite apart from his anxiety that he should not be suspected of "countenancing any doings of that sort." Seven-and-thirty virtuous years at sea, of which over twenty of immaculate command, and the last fifteen in the Sephora, seemed to have laid him under some pitiless obligation.(118-19)

Archbold's tenacity is "obscure," "incomprehensible," and "a little awful" to the captain only because he cannot admit that Leggatt might have done something truly criminal that would warrant his being prosecuted by the authorities; but it takes more than adjectives to justify a judgment. The captain further indicates that virtue such as Archbold has exercised during his thirty-seven years at sea is a fault and that such experience as Archbold's has obliged him in some mysterious way to offer Leggatt no pity in his enforcing of the law; Archbold's failure of character during the storm is indeed a fault, but the captain's expression of amazement at Archbold's desire to enforce the law results rather from the captain's own imaginary identification with Leggatt than from any knowledge of the traditions of the Service.

A brief consideration of a key element in Typhoon is relevant here: the young captain's attitude is very similar to Jukes's ridicule of MacWhirr for being unimaginative. Both Jukes and the captain display their immaturity in that they do not exercise sufficient control over their own imaginations, but whereas Jukes's imagining at the onset of the typhoon that death is imminent can be and is disciplined by MacWhirr's assertion of his authority, the captain in "The Secret Sharer" has no one to force him to see that the identification he feels with Leggatt is only imaginary or that Archbold may be justified in his

unrelenting search for Leggatt. Even Conrad fails to acknowledge the illusory nature of their relationship or to grant that Archbold could have good reason for what he does; instead of allowing the young captain to see the error of his ways or criticizing him for the way he treats Leggatt, Conrad proceeds to squeeze out all the feeling of intrigue and imaginary psychological profundity he can from the error of the captain's imagination. Certainly, Archbold's demoralization during the storm is similar to Jukes's during the typhoon, and it is fortunate for the Sephora that Leggatt was capable of acting even though his captain could not; but to claim Archbold's failure on the one count indicates a failure on the other is seriously to misjudge him, just as to assume Leggatt's saving the ship justifies his killing a man also misjudges Leggatt.

There are indeed cases where killing can be justified. For example, if Heyst had killed Jones, Ricardo, and Pedro when he recognized the threat they posed, there would have been no question that he had acted rightly. In fact, Conrad's criticism of Heyst's philosophical stance demands that Heyst be shown to have failed when he does not kill the intruders. Leggatt's killing of the crewman could have been justified, but is not: Conrad simply does not present enough information to enable his reader to tell whether Leggatt acted rightly. Moreover, he refuses to consider seriously that Leggatt and the captain might have been wrong or that Archbold might have been right. In order to consider how the opposing argument could have been presented, one need only recall the treatment rendered a similar situation in Under Western Eyes. Conrad's interest there is closely aligned with his interest in "The Secret Sharer" not simply in that the two tales deal with similar situations; he wrote the short story during the time his mind was engaged in writing

the novel. A comparison of the two should therefore illumine the different possibilities their common interest held for Conrad. Both tales deal with the reactions of a man when called on for sympathy and aid by another man who has just killed someone; but whereas the young captain spontaneously identifies with Leggatt, and Conrad projects the illusion of Leggatt's having judged and judged rightly, in Under Western Eyes Razumov struggles against the illusion of brotherhood that Haldin creates between them until he finally decides Haldin must be turned over to the law. Razumov despises Haldin from the first, but the decision he reaches to give him up is justified through his rational consideration of Haldin's deed and of Razumov's responsibility to his country:

> "What is this Haldin? And what am I? Only two grains of sand. But a great mountain is made up of just such insignificant grains. And the death of a man or of many men is an insignificant thing. Yet we combat a contagious pestilence. Do I want his death? No! I would save him if I could—but no one can do that—he is the withered member which must be cut off. If I must perish through him, let me at least not perish with him, and associated against my will with his sombre folly that understands nothing either of men or things. . . ."(36)

There are indeed many significant differences between Leggatt and Haldin, the captain and Razumov, a merchant ship and Russia; but a crucial point is that the young captain of "The Secret Sharer" never weights the merits of Leggatt's case vis-à-vis the possible consequences for himself if he were to be discovered. By refusing to admit such considerations as Razumov's into this story, Conrad presents a one-sided and therefore a weak case for the captain's and Leggatt's actions.

Conrad's heavy-handedness is further evidenced in the story's final scene where the captain carefully engineers Leggatt's escape so that his presence can remain undetected by the crew and drives the

ship into the very shadow of Koh-ring so Leggatt can easily swim to shore. This scene is made to the cinematographer's order: the captain's surreptitious maneuvering of Leggatt into the sail-locker, through a lobby and out one of the quarter-deck ports; his sailing the ship almost onto the rocks, but discovering just in time the floppy white hat floating in the sater so the ship's movement can be detected and she can be turned round. But the whole procedure is suspect: in this scene Conrad again opts for the spectacle instead of searching for truth. In the first place, the reason for driving the ship so close to the island is plausible, but inadequate. The captain claims that "on my conscience, it had to be thus close—no less"(144), but so far he has not exercised his conscience in the matter of Leggatt's deed, nor in considering what he himself ought to do. Rather, his manner of dealing with Leggatt results from his growing obsession with the belief that Leggatt is his second self. In any case, it is unclear why his conscience would direct him to perform an act so irrational and so dangerous. Furthermore, Leggatt has already proven himself quite capable of swimming considerable distances, so there is no need to approach as close to the island as the captain does, if his object is simply to ensure Leggatt's survival. To act as the captain does here is to act as a madman and demonstrates he is not fit to be in command of his ship.

Second, Conrad's presentation of how the captain deals with his mate's fear as he sees the land approaching is so powerfully reminiscent of Leggatt's killing the crewman that the reader neglects to consider that in this case the man who seems so much in control of the situation has unnecessarily created his own crisis. Here is Conrad's account of this episode:

> "She will never get out. You have done it, sir. I knew it'd end in something like this. She will never weather, and you are too close now to stay. She'll drift ashore before she's round. O my God!"
>
> I caught his arm as he was raising it to batter his poor devoted head, and shook it violently.
>
> "She's ashore already," he wailed, trying to tear himself away.
>
> "Is she? . . . Keep good full there!"
>
> "Good full, sir," cried the helmsman in a frightened, thin, child-like voice.
>
> I hadn't let go the mate's arm and went on shaking it. "Ready about, do you hear? You go forward"—shake—"and stop there"—shake—"and hold your noise"—shake—"and see these head-sheets properly overhauled"—shake, shake—shake.
>
> And all the time I dared not look towards the land lest my heart should fail me. I released my grip at last and he ran forward as if fleeing for dear life.(141)

Although the mate's and the helmsman's fears and the captain's self-possession are powerfully evoked and contrasted, the close similarity of this scene to that on the Sephora makes it feel again as if the killing had been necessary to ensure survival, just as the shaking of the mate's arm is necessary here to prevent the ship's running aground. Likewise, the episode pretends to show that since the captain and Leggatt are capable of acting in such similar ways, the captain's feeling of identity with Leggatt is justified. This, however, is another illusion: if the captain were to have killed a man, his action here would have fallen into the same category as Leggatt's and would justify the same consideration. However, the similarity of their manners cannot, in itself, make their actions identical, much as they might be made to seem so, and Conrad's concerted attempt to make them seem so distorts the moral issues involved.

Finally, the appearance of the hat in the right place at the right time provides a strong link between the captain's harboring Leggatt and his assertion of command at the time of crisis. This coincidence implies that Leggatt's appearance provided a test of the

captain's competence in command and suggests that his passing this test enables him to steer away from the threatening land mass at the right moment. The linking, however suggestively symbolic and powerfully spectacular, is not inevitable; in fact, the captain demonstrates his incompetence for command by driving his ship dangerously close to shore without just cause. The contrived crisis that requires sight of the floppy white hat for resolution provides a neat pattern for the tale and tidily knots together the central themes and emotions, but in doing so it bypasses the moral questions involved in favor of mere effect and continues to evoke the powerful feelings present in the tale to give credence to the illusion that Leggatt is the captain's second self and ought therefore not be condemned for his actions.

Leavis's contention that this story is a dramatization of Leggatt and the captain acting in contravention of law and tradition but in accord with a higher morality is indeed an attractive one, and Conrad gives ample evidence to support such an argument. "The Secret Sharer" further seems to justify Daleski's point about a capacity for abandon being a vital aspect of true self-possession. But Conrad's choice of the Sephora episode as the inciting incident for his tale of self-possession and moral responsibility is at the very least infelicitous, for it leads him to assert the correctness of Leggatt's brutal act and of the captain's sheltering him, even though the story does not show either of these acts to be responsible or right. Conrad's knowledge of the Cutty Sark's history offered him ample material for intense drama, but the power of his drama was apparently too much for him to control; it succeeds in diverting his attention from the moral issues he could have explored toward an elaboration of the emotions asserted by the dramatic spectacle.

The comparison Leavis suggests between this story and The Shadow-Line is a fruitful one, even if Leavis's discussion of that comparison misconstrues the significant similarities between the two tales. The scene in which the young captain of the latter tale agrees to take aboard the ailing Mr. Burns contains none of the pitfalls that make "The Secret Sharer" so powerfully diverting. But what The Shadow-Line lacks in emotional power is more than compensated for by its presenting a true and accurate understanding of the issues involved without, as here, obscuring the moral issues by excess feeling.

VII

The Egocentric Worlds of *The Secret Agent*

For Conrad, life is only life if it is lived by men in collaboration. It is not surprising therefore to find him writing, along with tales of the sea, novels that explore the political basis of society. His ultimate concern is, after all, the discovery of the condition of civilization and of the ways in which a civilization that allows for the possibility of human excellence can be maintained. In *The Secret Agent* and *Nostromo*, his two great political novels,[1] Conrad's concern leads him to investigate the imperfect human agents upon whom society depends for the maintenance of order as well as the all too human forces that would subvert that order. *The Secret Agent*, since it deals with a longstanding political order, concerns itself with the efforts of the authorities to protect society from those who are determined to undermine and destroy the established order. *Nostromo*, on the other hand, relates the history of an unstable Latin American country where there is no traditional order but, rather, an extremely precarious tyrannical order based on greed and gun; Conrad juxtaposes to this tyranny the ideals, wealth, and intelligence of Charles and Emilia Gould, who establish in its stead a decidedly more stable political structure.

Significantly, as if to affirm intentionally the tradition that holds the family unit to be the basis of society, Conrad explores his political interests in both these novels by focussing on family units whose lives are characterized by political involvement. The key difference between the Goulds and the Verlocs, aside from the obvious differences of class and country of residence, is that the former are active,

inquisitive, and morally aware and the latter are indolent in every way, particularly in their solipsistic habit of mind. This difference helps to explain Conrad's decision to adopt and sustain the ironic method to handle his fictional investigation of the bomb outrage on Greenwich Observatory: Adolph and Winnie Verloc, since they both keep vital secrets from each other, are each ignorant of the most significant facts about the other and complacently unaware of that ignorance until it is cruelly shattered by Winnie's reaction to the news of Stevie's death. Their lives are supported by secrecy, both morally and monetarily, and Conrad shows in his ironic analysis of their relation to the community how their solipsistic habit of secrecy is symptomatic of a general moral debility both among those who try to uphold the established order and those who are determined to destroy it.

Conrad says in a letter to R. B. Cunninghame Graham that his "technical intention" in The Secret Agent was the sustained "ironic treatment of a melodramatic subject."[2] In his execution of that intention, however, the irony, which in this novel is characteristically dramatic irony, takes on a significance far beyond the merely technical: instead of simply being a method of expressing theme, the irony itself becomes theme. There are two aspects of this irony: first there are the characters' being involved in situations of which they do not know and do not want to know the significance. The degree of this ignorance varies, depending on the individual, and is generally the direct result of each character's most peculiar trait, from the Verlocs' solipsism to Sir Ethelred's not having the patience or the time to be informed of significant details. The irony's other aspect is the underlying presence of the omniscient author, expressing through the ironic mode his intelligent judgment of the world he presents and employing some

of the characters to seek out the truth from which most of the characters are hiding.

These two aspects of the irony are central to the novel's conception—throughout the novel they are poignantly juxtaposed. On the one hand, there are those who believe, with Mrs. Verloc, that "life doesn't stand much looking into"; among these are the Professor, who would rather not know how or why his bombs are being used; Verloc, who sees no reason to wonder why Winnie should have wanted to marry him or why her mother should have committed herself to a home; and Ossipon, Yundt, Michaelis, and Michaelis's patroness, none of whom are capable of or interested in finding out the philosophical basis of the anarchist rhetoric of which they are all so fond. On the other hand, there are the men who, like Conrad himself, act because of a keen interest in investigating facts and motives and in gaining a thorough understanding of human experience; they are Chief Inspector Heat and the Assistant Commissioner, both of whom take action to ferret out the truth about the explosion in Greenwich Park. That Conrad should place the investigative curiosity of dedicated policemen in opposition to the novel's prevailing general mood of ignorance is a stroke of genius: his central theme is that the danger posed by secrecy and ignorance to the state and to the quality of human life generally is serious and immediate, and his decision to present it ironically, after the manner of a detective novel, is one of the major triumphs of his art.

It is significant that the very conception of the novel resulted from Conrad's unwillingness to accept the possibility that the bomb outrage in Greenwich Park in 1894 was simply an inexplicable act perpetrated by unreasonable men. In his preface—one of the most genuine, personal accounts he wrote of how he thought out a work

before writing it—Conrad recounts the steps of the mental process that culminated in his creating The Secret Agent, beginning with his bafflement over the "perverse unreason" that seemed to underlie the bomb attempt on the observatory. The absurdity of that outrage, he says, drove him to search for an explanation, which he finally realized was to be found in Mrs. Verloc's maternal passion:

> At last the story of Winnie Verloc stood out complete from the days of her childhood to the end, unproportioned as yet, with everything still on the first plan, as it were; but ready now to be dealt with. It was a matter of about three days.
> This book is that story, reduced to manageable proportions, its whole course suggested and centred round the absurd cruelty of the Greenwich Park explosion. I had there a task I will not say arduous but of the most absorbing difficulty. But it had to be done. It was a necessity. The figures grouped about Mrs. Verloc and related directly or indirectly to her tragic suspicion that "life doesn't stand much looking into," are the outcome of that very necessity.(xxvi-vii)

Although for some the truth may be too harsh to face, Conrad shows in this novel not only that life should be looked into, but that it must.

It should be noted that even though the investigative drives of Chief Inspector Heat and the Assistant Commissioner are similar to Conrad's striving to master his own bafflement, their openness to truth is severely limited by self-interest, and Conrad's is not. These two officials of the London police force operate in a far from perfect world and are far from perfect themselves; they participate in the moral debility of the society they are committed to defend. Conrad's perspective on them, too, is tinged with irony, but the judgment he presents of these two men reflects a substantial admiration and respect for their dedication as well as an understanding of their weaknesses. Heat, of course, is the more sophisticated detective, and over the years his efficiency has earned him a great deal of praise and respect, both from the general public and from his superiors. When he finds among Stevie's remains

the small piece of cloth with Verloc's address on it, he decides that it would be better for his own reputation and efficiency and for the public if he were simply to keep this shred of evidence to himself. Here is how Conrad presents that decision:

> He no longer considered it eminently desirable all round to establish publicly the identity of the man who had blown himself up that morning with such horrible completeness. But he was not certain of the view his department would take. A department is to those it employs a complex personality with ideas and even fads of its own. It depends on the loyal devotion of its servants, and the devoted loyalty of trusted servants is associated with a certain amount of affectionate contempt, which keeps it sweet, as it were. . . . A department does not know so much as some of its servants. Being a dispassionate organism, it can never be perfectly informed. It would not be good for its efficiency to know too much. Chief Inspector Heat got out of the train in a state of thoughtfulness entirely untainted with disloyalty, but not quite free of that jealous mistrust which so often springs on the ground of perfect devotion, whether to women or to institutions.(90-91)

That a police detective, a public servant, should discover a significant material fact and then choose to prevent it from becoming public knowledge is a fine example of how Conrad sustains his ironic method; and that Heat should choose to withhold his information from his own superiors demonstrates even more poignantly how the ignorance upon which the prevailing irony is based is a way of life in the world of The Secret Agent. Furthermore, Heat's decision to keep the information from his department results not from mere selfishness, but from loyalty: Heat honestly believes it would hamper the department's efficiency if he were to allow his secret informer to be connected with the explosion and thereby damage his own usefulness to the department and the public.

Heat's attempt to withhold this essential bit of information fails, partly because Michaelis, the convenient scapegoat toward whom Heat wants to direct the public indignation over the bomb outrage is in the favor of a great lady with whom the Assistant Commissioner's wife has been cultivating a social connection, and partly because that

same naturally inquisitive and suspicious Assistant Commissioner is as mistrustful of his most highly regarded subordinate as Heat is of him. Conrad presents the interview between the two detectives in great detail, providing an account of what each thinks and feels as well as a narration of what each says and does; he thereby makes it clear that even though they are engaged in a conversation on a common subject, each is struggling at the same time to protect his own personal world from disruption. The Assistant Commissioner, upon hearing that Michaelis could be connected with the affair,

> made a reflection extremely unbecoming his official position without being really creditable to his humanity.
> "If the fellow is laid hold of again," he thought, "she will never forgive me."(112-13)

Conrad perceives the Assistant Commissioner's dedication to his own selfish interest to be a weakness of character; however, Heat's "little conceited laugh" accompanying his insistence that Michaelis can and should be made to suffer for the outrage spur the Assistant Commissioner to transcend self-interest and to resist the pressures that have for eighteen months demanded that he cooperate passively as an administrator in the police bureaucracy. Conrad shows him being jolted by Heat's laugh, spinning round, and getting a glimpse of Heat's facial expression sufficient to move him to further investigation. The Assistant Commissioner, it turns out, "was a born detective"(117) whose adventurous disposition makes him particularly uncomfortable with being chained to a desk and who sees in this case a means of engaging himself in some serious investigative work. Conrad, however, does not shower the Assistant Commissioner with praise for an energetic, disinterested pursuit of truth: the Assistant Commissioner, it appears, has gained his liking for police work in a tropical colony where he became accustomed to exposing secrets ruthlessly, without a thought that

secrecy could be made to serve good purposes, and his ruthless pursuit of the loose ends of this case has something of the crude colonial jungle trooper about it; furthermore, his suspicion that Heat has something up his sleeve complements rather than contradicts his selfish concern that Michaelis not be linked to the affair.

Nevertheless, the Assistant Commissioner vows to get to the bottom of things, takes personal control of the investigation and proceeds to tell everything he knows to the Home Secretary—everything, that is, except the details Sir Ethelred insists he not be bothered with. The relation shown to exist between these two employees of the bureaucracy is quite the reverse of that between Heat and his superior: where Heat was determined to withhold facts from a superior intent on learning such facts, the Assistant Commissioner intends to reveal everything he knows but is prevented by Sir Ethelred's obsessive dislike of details. Although Conrad caricatures Sir Ethelred's deliberate avoidance of details by showing his appearance and demeanor to be altogether eccentric and ridiculous, he evinces a good deal of respect for Sir Ethelred's dealing in the appropriately serious manner with what the Assistant Commissioner places before him. Conrad justifies his caricature of Sir Ethelred by showing how his ignorance of details leads him to make several obvious blunders. When the Assistant Commissioner explains his coming to see him, Sir Ethelred manages to misconstrue the explanation in two different ways within the space of several lines of dialogue:

> "Yes, Sir Ethelred—— An imperfect world. Therefore directly the character of this affair suggested itself to me, I thought it should be dealt with with special secrecy, and ventured to come over here."
> "That's right," approved the great Personage, glancing down complacently over his double chin. "I am glad there's somebody over at your shop who thinks that the Secretary of State

> may be trusted now and then."
> The Assistant Commissioner had an amused smile.
> "I was really thinking that it might be better at this stage for Heat to be replaced by——"
> "What! Heat? An ass—eh?" exclaimed the great man, with distinct animosity.(139)

Although it must be granted that the Home Secretary is an important man, Conrad shows him here to be so mesmerized by his own sense of self-importance that he assumes the Assistant Commissioner has come simply to trust him with a police secret. The Assistant Commissioner is justly amused by this assumption, but when he continues his explanation, Sir Ethelred interrupts and hastily concludes that his visitor is suggesting Heat be taken off the case because he is "an ass"—an epithet so crass and vulgar that Sir Ethelred's speaking it shows it to be more appropriate to himself than to Heat.

The occasion of another of Sir Ethelred's blunders is related to the unusual circumstances that merit for this case the special treatment the Assistant Commissioner is suggesting:

> "The kind of thing which meets us under the surface of this affair, otherwise without gravity, is unusual—in this precise form at least—and requires special treatment."
> The tone of Sir Ethelred was deepened, full of conviction.
> "I should think so—involving the Ambassador of a foreign power!"
> "Oh! The Ambassador!" protested the other, erect and slender, allowing himself a mere half smile. "It would be stupid of me to advance anything of the kind. And it is absolutely unnecessary, because if I am right in my surmises, whether ambassador or hall porter it's a mere detail."
> Sir Ethelred opened a wide mouth, like a cavern, into which the hooked nose seemed anxious to peer; there came from it a subdued rolling sound, as from a distant organ with the scornful indignation stop.(138)

Conrad's having the Assistant Commissioner mention "whether ambassador or hall porter it's a mere detail" focusses attention on how Sir Ethelred's deliberate ignorance of details prevents him from making the fine distinctions required if this matter of great sensitivity is to be

judged aright; and the vast disparity between ambassador and hall porter justly travesties the Home Secretary's want of delicacy. Conrad completes the caricature with the description of the cavernous mouth and the hooked nose and the comparison with a distant organ, all of which satirize the solemnity with which Sir Ethelred utters his uninformed opinions.

After talking with Verloc, the Assistant Commissioner returns later that same night to tell Sir Ethelred what he has discovered. The Home Secretary may not be able to understand adequately what the Assistant Commissioner says without hearing the details upon which his statements are based, but he does have enough sense and enough experience in the bureaucracy to know that the matter ought to be referred to the Attorney-General, whose jurisdiction over the case is more immediate. Conrad simultaneously rounds off the caricature of the "great personage" and leads directly into the heart of the Assistant Commissioner's conclusions as he wraps up this second interview between the two men:

> "No. No details, please."
> The great shadowy form seemed to shrink away as if in physical dread of details; then came forward, expanded, enormous, and weighty, offering a large hand. "And you say that this man has got a wife?"
> "Yes, Sir Ethelred," said the Assistant Commissioner, pressing deferentially the extended hand. "A genuine wife and a genuinely, respectably, marital relation. He told me that after his interview at the Embassy he would have thrown everything up, would have tried to sell his shop, and leave the country, only he felt certain that his wife would not even hear of going abroad. Nothing could be more characteristic of the respectable bond than that," went on, with a touch of grimness, the Assistant Commissioner, whose own wife, too, had refused to hear of going abroad. "Yes, a genuine wife. And the victim was a genuine brother-in-law. From a certain point of view we are here in the presence of a domestic drama." (221-22)

There is a moral hollowness behind Sir Ethelred's pretensions of greatness, and that hollowness Conrad shows to be intimately, if not causally,

related to his dread of details; that such dread should be presented even as a physical dread further justifies the physical caricature, in which Conrad shows everything about Sir Ethelred to be disproportionately large. Sir Ethelred is great because he occupies an important political office, but the limits of that greatness are severely delineated: his sense of self-importance is as disproportionate as his physical stature.

The serious investigative work, of course, is performed not by Sir Ethelred, but by the Assistant Commissioner and by Conrad, both of whom perceive clearly that the essence of the case under study is the marital relation of Winnie and Adolph Verloc. Conrad expertly dramatizes the Assistant Commissioner's making the transition from the political to the familial through the double entendre on the word "domestic." The Home Secretary's jurisdiction ends and that of the Attorney-General begins when matters of international intrigue become criminal cases, but police jurisdiction does not end when circumstances surrounding a criminal act merge into the criminal's private life. The Assistant Commissioner correctly perceives that Verloc was forced to perform an act of violence because his wife denied the only alternative open to him, and he can sympathize fully with Verloc's situation because his life has been similarly restricted. His jurisdiction as a policeman does not end at this point, but in this matter his personal constitution does not accord with his official responsibility: his identification with Verloc effectively prevents him from carrying his investigation any further. Even the Assistant Commissioner, the prime investigator in this detective story, is restricted by personal considerations in his ability to understand the workings of the world around him: such is life in the ironic world of <u>The Secret Agent</u>.

Conrad's investigation, however, has no such limitations. He knows the ultimate causes of this domestic drama and proceeds to portray relentlessly the macabre and grisly working out of the story's underlying forces, the key to which is, as he notes in the preface, Winnie Verloc's maternal passion. It is precisely this passion that drove her into marriage with Verloc. Winnie's mother, of course, is also the mother of Stevie, and her decision to commit herself to a home so that Stevie can be better provided for is similar to her daughter's decision to marry Verloc, even though Winnie's mother is ignorant of the reasons for that marriage, just as Winnie is ignorant of her mother's reasons for moving to the home. Both women's lives are strictly circumscribed by their ignorance of significant information about even their own family life, and yet both are wholly dedicated to caring for Stevie, the retarded boy who, ironically, is incapable of understanding anything but wants very much to do so.

. Stevie's disgust for the beating the cab driver gives his decrepit horse is typical: he is outraged at what he sees to be wanton cruelty and is unable to understand that economic necessity is simply not always compatible with kindness to animals. After listening to the cab driver explain that he has a wife and four children to support and that he must earn his living with whatever horses the management supplies, Stevie is no closer to understanding the underlying causes of the situation he witnesses. In fact, he shows himself perfectly incapable of resolving such a simple contradiction. Conrad explains fully the dynamics of Stevie's limited mind as it tries to cope with the problem:

> "'Ard on 'osses, but dam' sight 'arder on poor chaps like me," [the cab driver] wheezed just audibly.
> "Poor! Poor!" stammered out Stevie, pushing his hands

> deeper into his pocket with convulsive sympathy. He could say nothing; for the tenderness to all pain and all misery, the desire to make the horse happy and the cabman happy, had reached the point of a bizarre longing to take them to bed with him. And that, he knew, was impossible. For Stevie was not mad. It was, as it were, a symbolic longing; and at the same time it was very distinct, because springing from experience, the mother of wisdom. Thus when as a child he cowered in a dark corner scared, wretched, sore, and miserable with the black, black misery of the soul, his sister Winnie used to come along, and carry him off to bed with her, as into a heaven of consoling peace. Stevie, though apt to forget mere facts, such as his name and address for instance, had a faithful memory of sensations. To be taken into a bed of compassion was the supreme remedy, with the only one disadvantage of being difficult of application on a large scale. And looking at the cabman, Stevie perceived this clearly, because he was reasonable.(167-68)

Stevie is clearly not mad; if he were, he would have tried to take the horse and the cabbie both to bed with him. That such is the extent of his reasoning capacity, however, demonstrates that, like the world his sister inhabits, Stevie's world is greatly constricted by a condition of mind. In his case, though, the constriction clearly results from a physiological rather than a psychological defect.

Conrad continues, emphasizing the serious confusion the experience of the cab ride engenders in Stevie by showing Stevie's determination to understand that bewildering experience. Stevie bemoans the condition of the poor people who must earn their livings beating poor, dumb animals and that of the animals who must perforce be beaten, and he feels that someone ought to be severely punished for the evils of an economic system that requires such behavior. Conrad clarifies the essential difference between Stevie's retarded understanding and Winnie's solipsism when he shows Winnie rejecting Stevie's idea that it is the police who should be called on to correct this unhappy relation of horse and cabbie. "'The police aren't for that,'" she says;

> "Not for that?" he mumbled, resigned but surprised. "Not for that?" He had formed for himself an ideal conception of

> the metropolitan police as a sort of benevolent institution for the suppression of evil. The notion of benevolence especially was very closely associated with his sense of the power of the men in blue. He had liked all police constables tenderly, with a guileless trustfulness. And he was pained. He was irritated, too, by a suspicion of duplicity in the members of the force. For Stevie was frank and as open as the day himself. What did they mean by pretending then? Unlike his sister, who put her trust in face values, he wished to go to the bottom of the matter. He carried on his inquiry by means of an angry challenge.
>
> "What are they for then, Winn? What are they for? Tell me,"(172-73)

That the jurisdiction of the police does not include moral considerations is demonstrated in the investigations of the Assistant Commissioner and Chief Inspector Heat; both know that moral questions were involved in Verloc's decision to carry out the bomb attempt, but they also know that their interest in the affair as police officers involves only legal, not moral, questions. Stevie's intelligence is too limited to perceive the difference between legal and moral considerations, even though he is eager to have it explained to him. Winnie, however, when confronted in this way, follows her usual mental habit and, instead of pursuing the question vigorously and providing an answer for Stevie (which he could not have understood anyway), she resorts to the cliché that the policeman's job is to defend the property of the rich from the clutches of the poor.

The inevitable result of the novel's conception, centred as it is on Winnie's maternal passion, is that Stevie is destroyed by the bomb. Stevie's violent disintegration also dramatizes with a spectacular vengeance the pressures compelling Verloc to obey Vladimir's directive in the first place. Vladimir scoffs at Verloc's being married, though pretending to be an anarchist: anarchists, by definition have no ties to other people and no responsibilities. It is the threat of terminating Verloc's income, however, that forces Verloc to consider his

financial responsibility to Winnie and provides the ultima ratio for his performance of that unreasonable and outrageous act. Ironically, Vladimir's putting the squeeze on Verloc is only effective because of that very marital tie of which Vladimir so strongly disapproves. The irony is intensified by Conrad's understanding that, although Verloc does not know it, Winnie married him simply to secure financial support for Stevie. The dramatization of Stevie's death is the most potent example of this irony, which achieves its finest expression during the Verlocs' final conversation: there Verloc eloquently demonstrates the awful extent of his vain ignorance of the central fact of his wife's existence when he tries to calm her down by asking, innocently, "'Do be reasonable, Winnie. What would it have been if you had lost me?'"(234)

Stevie is at the heart of the novel not only thematically, but structurally, too. The pervasive moral interest underlying Conrad's irony led him to abandon what would have been the conventional method of narrating a detective story and to create in its place an ordering of scenes that could, in its boldness, sharpen the ironic presentation of plot and character through stark and swift spatial and temporal breaks, with Stevie's death the focal point of the disruptions. These breaks are of two distinct types: one is the more or less conventional flashback, the other involves a disjointing of the primary narrative flow. There are many flashbacks that provide, in startling ways, some poignantly significant connections: for example, when Heat suggests the whole affair should be pinned on Michaelis, the Assistant Commissioner reflects on how such a course of action would affect his personal life, and Conrad inserts a flashback dramatizing the reasons for his concern through the Assistant Commissioner's memory of a conversation he had heard between Michaelis and the great lady. And when Heat happens

upon the Professor in a deserted alley, Conrad tells of all Heat has been through earlier in the day in pursuit of his official interest in the explosion in Greenwich park and in the fragments of flesh and bone a constable had gathered with a shovel for Heat to inspect; in so doing, Conrad dramatically emphasizes the moral and even the physical connection between the sickening vision of the fragmented Stevie and the 'perfect anarchist' who made the bomb. The presence of numerous flashbacks also helps to show that the world of The Secret Agent is so rife with ignorance and so dislocated that even time and space themselves are in disarray; a disconcerting fact that finds its perfect symbolic expression in the attempt to destroy Greenwich Observatory, the first meridian, the universal standard for both time and space. The distortions of time and space are a deliberate method of heightening the tale's ever-present irony: through them Conrad emphasizes the extreme danger to human life that is posed when people, like the Verlocs, fail to participate in the moral life of the community. The Observatory is not destroyed; in fact, the failure of the woefully inept attempt to destroy it suggests that it may be immune to destruction. Conrad shows Stevie's violent disintegration to be painfully real and powerfully symbolic, and thereby asserts that it is humanity that suffers—not time, space or buildings—when the inanity of selfishness supplants morality.

There are two points in the novel where the distortions cut much deeper into the narrative flow than do the flashbacks. The first occurs between chapters three and four, where Conrad leaps forward from Mr. and Mrs. Verloc in bed the night of Verloc's fateful visit to the embassy to the discussion by Ossipon and the Professor of the explosion in Greenwich Park; the second comes between chapters seven and eight where, after having shown the Assistant Commissioner on his way to

Verloc's shop, Conrad shifts back to the scene, long before the explosion, in which Stevie's mother prepares to commit herself to the home. In each case the shift of scene suggests temporal and spatial disruption, but at the same time it also allows Conrad the means to dissect and study the respective reactions of Winnie Verloc and the Professor to the news of the violence in Greenwich Park. That each has a very special interest in what has happened and yet is ignorant of the event when the scene opens is again a function of Conrad's irony and enables Conrad to draw attention to the significance of his dramatization, in each of these scenes, of the cognitive processes and moral sensibilities of Winnie and the Professor.

At the beginning of chapter four the reader too does not know of Stevie's connection to the affair or even if Verloc has decided to follow Vladimir's directive, and since Ossipon's telling of the newspaper account necessarily omits the macabre details and personal consequences of the event, the reader is able to experience the Professor's dispassionate response with a substantial degree of emotional detachment. The Professor responds to the information with some surprise, a slight vexation, and a little disappointment, and he assumes that since he made the bomb for Verloc, Verloc must be the man who was blown up. The most significant part of his reaction, however, is his cool detachment. "'What happens to us as individuals is not of the least consequence,'" (72) he says with absolute sincerity, thus explaining how he can so coolly accept Verloc's death and why he is able to threaten his own life continuously and openly as a means of challenging the law. Most of chapter four is taken up with issues other than the problem of Verloc's fate: Ossipon's speaking of bombs and anarchy stimulates the Professor to proclaim his dedication to the development of a perfect detonator and to

elaborate on the intellectual basis of his own brand of anarchy, which is decidedly not that of Ossipon and the Red Committee. These issues are or course intimately connected to Stevie's and Verloc's fates, since Conrad's presentation of them here explains the reasons for the bomb's creation and justifies Vladimir's conviction that anarchy must be vigorously combatted.

It comes out that the Professor's conception of anarchy is not only different from that of the Committee; it is in fact a strictly unique creation of his own ego. His brand of anarchy is therefore absolutely without restraint, even the slight restraint membership in the Committee requires of the other anarchists; Conrad calls his brand of anarchy "perfect" because it frees the Professor from responsibility to any other man or to any moral standards. Here is the relevant portion of Conrad's analysis of the Professor's raison d'être:

> Of humble origin, and with an appearance really so mean as to stand in the way of his considerable natural abilities, his imagination had been fired early by the tales of men rising from the depths of poverty to positions of authority and affluence. The extreme, almost ascetic purity of his thought, combined with an astounding ignorance of worldly conditions, had set before him a goal of power and prestige to be attained without the medium of arts, graces, tact, wealth—by sheer weight of merit alone. On that view he considered himself entitled to undisputed success. His father, a delicate dark enthusiast with a sloping forehead, had been an itinerant and rousing preacher of some obscure but rigid Christian sect—a man supremely confident in the privileges of his righteousness. In the son, individualist by temperament, once the science of colleges had replaced thoroughly the faith of the conventicles, this moral attitude translated itself into a frenzied puritanism of ambition. He nursed it as something secularly holy. To see it thwarted opened his eyes to the true nature of the world, whose morality was artificial, corrupt, and blasphemous.(80-81)

As in "The Secret Sharer," Lord Jim, Typhoon and The Shadow-Line, an overactive imagination is linked here with irresponsible antisocial behavior. The Professor's imagination is an extreme type, even in this tale of extreme types. He is the embodiment of a vicious

solipsism that commits him to the utter destruction of the social order simply because he feels persecuted by it. His perverse, egotistical hatred of society is so rapacious that he is convinced even his own life should be sacrificed if in so doing he could undermine the institutions that he imagines to have been repressing him all his life. Conrad shows the Professor to have taken to science as if it were a religion and to have dedicated himself to inventing a perfect detonator as a means with no other end than the Professor's personal gratification; that Conrad should show him also to be astoundingly ignorant of the world he so despises is yet another triumph of the tale's pervasive irony.

At the opening of chapter four, Ossipon remarks to the Professor that "'You are the man who would know the inside of this confounded affair'"(61); the Professor replies:

> "In principle what one of us may or may not know as to any given fact can't be a matter for inquiry to the others."(61)

The Professor's solipsism, it seems, is concomitant with the conviction that "life doesn't stand much looking into"; it is therefore significant that Conrad should, in the two places where the narrative is most severely disrupted, use the very structure of his tale to emphasize the similarities between the Professor and Winnie Verloc. Neither Winnie nor the Professor care for anything more than they do for their own feelings, and both are ignorant of the ways of the world. His deadly mentality is the result of his ignorance of civilized life, and her equally deadly philosophy of life, focussed as it is on her idiot brother, likewise is engendered in her by a constitutional abstinence from that collaborative effort without which civilized life is impossible.

The situation is much different at the end of chapter three from that at the end of chapter seven. By the time chapter eight opens with Winnie's mother preparing to take up residence in the almshouse, for the sake of her beloved Stevie, the reader is painfully aware of the consequences of Verloc's carrying out Vladimir's directive. The knowledge that Stevie has been brutally victimized by a cruel and perverse hoax colors the remainder of the tale with a powerful pathos that carries through from this point to Winnie's final discovery of the truth. Conrad tells of how Winnie's mother has been secretly pleading with the almshouse director to secure her a room, and he also explains that she decided to move into the almshouse to sever her ties with Stevie so that he would become more dependent on Verloc, who she hopes will become more of a father to him once she is gone. Being secretive herself, she tells no one of her motive for leaving her children, and since Winnie is so thoroughly convinced that things do not bear looking into, Winnie never tries to find out. Conrad's dramatization of Winnie's response to the news of her mother's plans is a precise and effective characterization of the young woman:

> The shock of the information was so unexpected that Mrs. Verloc, against her usual practice when addressed, interrupted the domestic occupation she was engaged upon. It was the dusting of the furniture in the parlour behind the shop. She turned her head towards her mother.
>
> "Whatever did you want to do that for?" she exclaimed, in scandalized astonishment.
>
> The shock must have been severe to make her depart from that distant and uninquiring acceptance of facts which was her force and her safeguard in life.
>
> "Weren't you made comfortable enough here?"
>
> She had lapsed into these inquiries, but next moment she saved the consistency of her conduct by resuming her dusting, while the old woman sat scared and dumb over her dingy white cap and lustreless dark wig.
>
> Winnie finished the chair, and ran the duster along the mahogany at the back of the horsehair sofa on which Mr. Verloc loved to take his ease in hat and overcoat. She was

> intent on her work, but presently she permitted herself another question.
>
> "How in the world did you manage it, mother?"
>
> As not affecting the inwardness of things, which it was Mrs. Verloc's principle to ignore, this curiosity was excusable. It bore merely on the methods. The old woman welcomed it eagerly as bringing forward something that could be talked about with much sincerity.(153)

Winnie's first two questions, it seems, are merely rhetorical. Since it is her mother's habit not to talk of matters "affecting the inwardness of things," just as it is Winnie's habit not to inquire into such matters, the questions show themselves to be ironically automatic reflexes. That they result from a shock akin to that Winnie experiences when she learns of Stevie's death illustrates that it is indeed possible for Winnie's secret world to be disturbed by external forces. This disturbance is minor compared to that one, and that Conrad should work into his account of it a mention of what should have been a regular disturbance to her, but was not, demonstrates how self-sustaining and satisfactory Winnie believes her world to be. The reference here is to the point that Winnie's dusting includes among its objects "the horse-hair sofa on which Mr. Verloc loved to take his ease in hat and overcoat." If she were the least interested in her husband's welfare, she would have wondered why he would want to leave his hat and coat on while relaxing inside the home: such behavior surely is a clear sign of distress. But being by nature uninquisitive, she simply accepts that her husband does such things and proceeds nonchalantly to dust the sofa, along with the other parlour furniture.

It is said that successful marriages are made in heaven. If this is so, the marriage of Winnie and Adolph Verloc was surely made in hell. They are both secretive by temperament, and that he is secretive by profession as well helps to illustrate why the marriage is a disaster. Conrad shows both of them, in the fullness of their ignorance,

believing everything is all right between them and being utterly content in that belief. Their contentment is a function of their constitutional dislike of serious inquiry, and in Verloc's case that contentment, though undercut by professional difficulties, is the mainstay of his overpowering indolence. The catastrophic consequences of their relationship are genuinely inevitable: Conrad poignantly dramatizes in his account of their lives how deadly is the result when two married persons, the nucleus of a family, fail to share in each other's vitality. The Verlocs not only have nothing in common, aside from their common habit of secrecy, but they also, through their secretiveness, deny what vitality there would have been to share if they should have had the will to do so. These two conditions of their being are shown, in a major triumph of Conrad's ironic art, to be concomitant facts of their married life. Conrad has Winnie murder her husband, then proceed to kill herself, as a means of realizing in the physical realm what has long been true in the moral: their violent deaths by Winnie's hand is simply the working out of the consequences of their collaborative failure in marriage.

The Verlocs' marriage has been doomed to failure from the start. Conrad's presentation of their married state is characterized by the impossibility of the marriage's success. Winnie marries Verloc to provide security for her helpless Stevie, without having any idea of how Verloc makes his living; Verloc, totally ignorant of her obsession with Stevie's welfare, marries her because he is vain enough to believe she is very fond of him and because of his inclination to complement his indolent temperament with the passive bliss of domestic tranquility. News of Stevie's death mercilessly destroys their illusions of marital bliss, but it is characteristic that even at the end, neither is even faintly aware of how the other feels or what the other is about to do.

Winnie is so obsessed with the fact that Verloc took Stevie out to kill him that she cannot hear the explanation Verloc provides; she has been so passionately dependent upon Stevie's reliance on her that she can know only of his death and of Verloc's part in it. Verloc is so upset by being coerced to act that, now the deed has been attempted, he can only feel depressed; it matters little to him that Stevie has been killed, and he believes it also matters little to the continuing tranquility of their marriage. He even tries to share some of the blame with her, contending that, after all, she was the one who encouraged him to take Stevie on walks with him and her sewing that label into Stevie's coat enabled the police to connect him with the affair. Confident that his superficial show of compassion can soothe her, he assures Winnie that even though he will have to go to prison, once he is released they can continue as they always had. But the very reason for the marriage no longer exists; Stevie is dead, and the subtlest, most poignant irony of all is that he has been killed trying to help Verloc earn the money that would have continued to support Stevie and would thereby have kept the marriage going.

Like the shock she experiences when hearing of her mother's plans, Winnie's reaction to the news of Stevie's death is uncharacteristic: she is not normally inclined to violence, just as she is not normally inclined to looking into things. Yet that uncharacteristic act is such that it actually reinforces Conrad's conception of her as essentially passive. Conrad, after having shown Winnie overhear the conversation between Verloc and Chief Inspector Heat and thereby learning of Stevie's fate, presents this account of her reaction:

> Mrs. Verloc, behind the counter, might have heard but did not see [Heat's] departure, pursued by the aggressive clatter of the bell. She sat at her post of duty behind the counter.

> She sat rigidly erect in the chair with two dirty pink pieces of paper lying spread out at her feet. The palms of her hands were pressed convulsively to her face, with the tips of the fingers contracted against the forehead, as though the skin had been a mask which she was ready to tear off violently. The perfect immobility of her pose expressed the agitation of rage and despair, all the potential violence of tragic passions, better than any shallow display of shrieks, with the beating of a distracted head against the walls, could have done.(212)

Mrs. Verloc is characteristically passive and uninquisitive, but the most painful news possible having been imposed upon her consciousness, the passiveness reveals itself as a potential for violence that has simply never been utilized. Up to this point, her maternal passion has been vented through her sheltering of Stevie. Now that the object of her maternal passion has been cruelly destroyed, she has no normal outlet for that passion, so it begins to fester within her until it gathers enough power to make her act.

The course of action she takes is unpremeditated; it is suggested to her by perceptions of words and things in the room. Conrad shows Verloc cutting the cold beef that has been lying on the table and then devouring it; shortly thereafter, Verloc, venting his indignation at Vladimir, exclaims:

> "A silly, jeering, dangerous brute, with no more sense than—— After all these years! A man like me! And I have been playing my head at that game. You didn't know. Quite right, too. What was the good of telling you that I stood the risk of having a knife stuck into me any time these seven years we've been married? I am not a chap to worry a woman that's fond of me. You had no business to know."(238)

A little later, when outlining to Winnie how she should go about selling the shop after he has served most of his prison sentence, he remarks, "'I have no mind to get a knock on the head or a stab in the back directly I am let out'"(248). Significantly, both these references to stabbing are connected with his ignorant belief that Winnie is fond of him, and they prepare the way for that final thrust with which Winnie,

in response to the "note of wooing"(262) in Verloc's asking her to "'Come here,'" dramatically denies there was ever any love in their marriage. Although the scene of the murder is dramatically spectacular in the same way Heyst's self-immolation is spectacular, this climactic action in The Secret Agent is shown to be the inevitable result of the moral fatuity the novel explores ~~and of~~ the divergent but similar temperaments of its two central characters. That the scene, presented from the indolent Verloc's point of view, should show the victim in repose on the horsehair sofa passively observing the thrust of the knife into his breast, further evidences the thoroughness of Conrad's ironic perspective while at the same time demonstrating the perfect consistency of Verloc's character: he achieves in death the ultimate state of indolence.

Conrad's analysis of Winnie Verloc's state of mind on that fateful evening shows her realizing that, now Stevie is dead, there is nothing left to bind her to Verloc. She wanders stiffly and aimlessly about the house, not knowing what to do with her unexpected and unwanted freedom. Up to this point her entire purpose in living has been to take care of Stevie, but now she has no purpose, and thus no moral principle, to restrain her conduct. She kills Verloc to avenge the loss of Stevie, to enact her freedom, and to guarantee that Verloc can never again attempt to impose his selfish designs on her. As the paroxysm subsides, Conrad shows how her act has effected a cataclysmic alteration of her life:

> The stabbing of Mr. Verloc had been only a blow. It had relieved the pent-up agony of shrieks strangled in her throat, of tears dried up in her hot eyes, of the maddening and indignant rage at the atrocious part played by that man, who was less than nothing now, in robbing her of the boy. It had been an obscurely prompted blow. The blood trickling on the floor off the handle of the knife had turned it into an

> extremely plain case of murder. Mrs. Verloc, who always refrained from looking deep into things, was compelled to look into the very bottom of this thing. She saw there no haunting face, no reproachful shade, no vision of remorse, no sort of ideal conception. She saw there an object. That object was the gallows. Mrs. Verloc was afraid of the gallows. (267)

In killing her husband, her freedom was absolute, but now it is done she finds that act to have absolutely destroyed her freedom. The unforeseen fact that as a murderess she faces the prospect of legal retribution coincidentally forces itself upon her, and her abject terror of the gallows results from this plain and simple fact imposing itself on her uninquiring consciousness. Significantly, Conrad also points to her being oblivious to guilt or culpability: Verloc's body she perceives to be no more relevant to her than the cold beef lying on the table. For her, there is no such thing as morality; she has been morally dead all along, relying on Stevie's dependence on her to provide what little purpose she had. Now he is gone, it is only a matter of time until her madness and despair work themselves out and she is dead physically as well.

Thus does Conrad judge Winnie Verloc and her husband and the menace of secrecy and ignorance to civilized life: his sinister expression of sympathy for their fate comes out as a faithfully following through of their lives to their inevitable conclusions. But once all this has been said and the justly deserved praise has been rendered this magnificent triumph of Conrad's art, one is left with the uneasy feeling that by adopting the ironic perspective so relentlessly Conrad may have cut himself off from the consideration of vital questions. The central moral question—that faced by the young man who, at the beginning of The Shadow-Line abandons a felicitous berth, wondering "Can my life be for this?"—is never faced in this novel. There is no consciousness,

aside from Conrad's own, present in The Secret Agent that is capable of pursuing such an inquiry, and Conrad, in conceiving the novel as he does, allows himself only the opportunity to dramatize what he has found life not to be for. The secrecy and indolence Conrad condemns in The Secret Agent certainly ought to be condemned, but in committing himself to the ironic mode Conrad prevents himself from offering any positive alternative.

Ian Watt suggests that the enduring positive feature of The Secret Agent is the constancy of the masses, whose presence is shown to provide the backdrop and the motivation for activities of the police, the anarchists, and of Mr. Vladimir. "In the end," says Watt,

> neither Chief Inspector Heat nor the Assistant Commissioner has any more effect upon 'the street full of men' than either the anarchists or the reforming politicians who want to change it. Instead, all the various efforts to move the masses cancel each other out . . . . In the vast scale of our society, it seems, anger and evil have no more final efficacy than laziness or love; all are muffled and distorted, like the sounds made in the Marabar caves in Forster's A Passage to India; and what finally emerges is the monotonous and meaningless but persistent hum of the street full of men.[3]

But even if it were true that in the modern world the only positive and enduring fact is the meaningless hum of the immoveable masses, that would not justify Conrad's presenting it as such in The Secret Agent. In fact, Conrad's strongest motivation for writing any of his novels is to show how man can achieve excellence, to demonstrate, for example, by his presentation of Marlow in Heart of Darkness or of Heyst in Victory, that man can and should rise above meaninglessness by the active exercising of his judgment. The problem with The Secret Agent is that aside from the rather weak positive examples of Chief Inspector Heat and the Assistant Commissioner, there are only judgments presented on how one is not to achieve excellence.

That Watt should liken the hum of Conrad's masses to the echoes of Forster's caves is significant and revealing: both sounds symbolize dangerous threats to men who hold that life can have meaning and that a serious adherence to moral principle is required if human excellence is to be possible. In The Survival of English, Ian Robinson comments on the nature of the threat posed by the Marabar Caves:

> 'Everything exists, nothing has value.' Mrs Moore in A Passage to India learns this from the god of the Marabar caves, and it is the end of her. As far as we are concerned . . . we have to be able to rewrite the sentence and say everything has value, nothing merely 'exists.' With her values, her sense of the difference between marriage and rape, Mrs Moore has lost what F. R. Leavis calls a 'grasp of a real', as well as her will to go on living. Her death, merely reported later in the novel, only confirms, without much emphasizing it, that anything truly to be called 'her life' has ended.[4]

Mrs. Moore's moral life ends in the Marabar Caves. Similarly, Winnie and Adolph Verloc, as members of the immoveable and valueless masses, are never alive morally; and Conrad condemns with unerring accuracy the homogenizing power of the masses as an insidious and very real threat to the meaningful life that civilization exists to maintain. In this respect, Conrad's novel is far superior to that of Forster, who, instead of showing the levelling force of the Marabar Caves to be evil, makes the caves objects of sentimental devotion and elevates the valueless Mrs. Moore into a godhead.

VIII

Greed versus Principle: The Significance of the Occidental Republic

Talleyrand once remarked to Napoleon, "You can do everything with bayonets, Sire, except sit on them." In so saying, the renowned French statesman brilliantly defined the inadequacy of military force as the basis of political power. In Nostromo, Conrad explores the elemental political forces operative in a fictitious Latin American state and discovers a similar truth: Nostromo dramatizes the conception and birth of a new nation in a place long tyrannized by external military forces and shows how only a government with the moral support of its people can provide the stability required for civilized life. This novel is not, therefore, a political treatise, but a novel, an artistic rendering of life that deals with a preeminently political subject, shows politics to be the realm not only of politicians but of every civilized man, and demonstrates that politics is intrinsic to every aspect of human life, from the economic and technical to the religious.

Nostromo is Conrad's greatest achievement as a novelist. Its structural vitality, its breadth of scope, and its sure grasp of human experience in the modern world all attest to its artistic excellence. Although it suffers from the occasional lapse of vigor in language and perspicacity and is therefore less perfect than The Shadow-Line and Typhoon, Conrad's mastery of Nostromo's breadth and complexity demonstrates a much fuller understanding of the larger forces at work in the human world than those tales would allow.

As F. R. Leavis notes, Nostromo is a rich and subtle public

drama that is intensely organized into a pattern of moral significances.[1] That pattern, however, is not centred on any hero; rather, it develops out of the characters' common interest in the silver of the San Tomé mine. At one extreme there are the rapacious officials of Costaguana's numerous military dictatorships whose lust for power is invariably linked with greed and who employ their power to squeeze the mine for all it is worth; at the other are Martin Decoud, the "dilettante in life" who has no personal interest in the silver and no personal stake in the fate of the Occidental Province, and Dr. Monygham, whose self-contempt, along with his selfless devotion to Emilia Gould, has nurtured in him a fine sense of community totally incompatible with self-aggrandizement of any kind. Between these two extremes are many figures, both major and minor, whose characters are defined by their various attitudes to the immense wealth of the mine. The most important inhabitants of this middle ground are Charles and Emilia Gould, who come to Sulaco equipped with high moral ideals, dedicated to employing the Gould Concession for the betterment of life in the community. Conrad illustrates in his presentation of the Goulds how greed can be subdued by moral principle; he shows, in presenting various instances of piety, both sacred and profane, how the Goulds' moral principles are very much akin to the traditional Christianity practiced in Latin America, and he demonstrates how the power of wealth can and ought to be used to improve the quality of human life.

The ordering principles of Nostromo's pattern are introduced in the account of the legend of the gringos on Azuera, which Conrad presents in the first chapter. The novel opens with a vivid evocation of the physical setting that is to serve as a backdrop for all the action, a physical description that is at once sensual and suggestive of the

moral significances resonating through the novel. Conrad's account of the treasure-hunting gringos is presented as part of the scene-setting process, thereby introducing the central themes of the novel in a way that makes them inhere in Sulaco's very geography. On the second evening after their departure, a spiral of smoke from their campfire attracts the attention of everyone within sight of it, but after that, the gringos disappear and are never seen or heard from again:

> The impious adventurers gave no other sign. The sailors, the Indian, and the stolen burro were never seen again. As to the mozo, a Sulaco man—his wife paid for some masses, and the poor four-footed beast, being without sin, had been probably permitted to die; but the two gringos, spectral and alive, are believed to be dwelling to this day amongst the rocks, under the fatal spell of their success. Their souls cannot tear themselves away from their bodies mounting guard over the discovered treasure. They are now rich and hungry and thirsty—a strange theory of tenacious gringo ghosts suffering in their starved and parched flesh of defiant heretics, where a Christian would have renounced and been released.(5)

The juxtaposing of the impious gringos ("Americanos, perhaps"[4]) and the eternal curse accompanying their success and the Sulaco man, whose allegiance to Christianity permits his release from the accursed treasure, establishes a contrast between the residents of the Occidental Province and the imperialists from the United States and elsewhere and suggests that in the world of Nostromo, greed threatens to displace piety as the highest human purpose. The third sentence of this paragraph, however, introduces some rather damaging syntactical confusions: Conrad says that the burro, "being without sin," was permitted to die, and he suggests that the Sulaco man was also permitted to die, since one of the major contrasts he makes between this man and the gringos is that the latter are condemned to a living hell, whereas the former has been released from this world. But the sentence only says that the

man's wife paid for some masses and does not specify his actual fate, which the reader is left to infer from the fact that he and the burro are spoken of together. The contrast is muddled a bit further later when Conrad indicates that in order to be released, a Christian need only renounce the world of flesh; but the Sulaco man, apparently saved by his wife's actions, not his own, does not fall into this category. Conrad tries to sharpen the contrast by calling the gringos "heretics," but he only succeeds in uttering a phrase so awkward one could hardly call it English: "gringo shosts suffering in their starved and parched flesh of defiant heretics." In spite of the awkward phrasing and confused syntax, however, the pattern of greed versus piety is clear enough here and is restated often in the novel, frequently in simple references to the legend of the gringos on Azuera. Furthermore, Conrad's paragraph introduces the feeling of ominous foreboding about the corrupting influence a treasure can have on men not equipped with moral principle—a feeling with which the entire novel reverberates.

Conrad's statement here and throughout Nostromo of the difficulty of modern man's management of the earth's material wealth without the moral guidance that is being lost along with the Christian tradition of piety is elucidated in the essays of George Grant, a Canadian philosopher, written in the 1960's and published as Technology and Empire. As it is in Nostromo, "the basic problem of our society," says Grant, "is the problem of individuals finding meaning to their existence";[2] Grant's subject in these essays, however, is not Nostromo, but the spiritual condition of the Western world that gave rise to Nostromo sixty years before and that still prevails in the final third of the twentieth century. Both of these books analyse the moral vacuum men of the twentieth century must fill if their technology is to be more

than a means to further what Grant calls the "emancipation of greed"[3] and if their politics is to be something other than a means of legitimizing that emancipation. The decline of piety,[4] the "emancipation of greed," and the enthralling dynamism of technological progress that Grant shows to be essential facts of modern life are all present in Conrad's dramatization of life in the Occidental Republic, from the steam power of the O. S. N. that thrusts the port of Sulaco into world commerce, the railway built across the mountains, and the modern rifles brought by Decoud from Europe to the mercantile pseudo-religion of Holroyd, the American financier, and the haunting presence of the cursed gringos of Azuera.

The legend of the gringos is referred to repeatedly: often enough that the reader never forgets it for long, yet not so often that he might think of it more than he does of the characters being presented whose lives are illumined by references to the legend. Colonel Sotillo is perhaps the most fully developed character in Nostromo whose primary motivation is, like that of the gringos, sheer greed: if it is not his own greed, it is that of General Montero, whose favor he must buy with the shipment of silver if he is to stay alive. Pedrito Montero's unexpected presence in Sulaco when Sotillo arrives drives Sotillo to desperation, and the proximity of the treasure so infects his mind that his characterization offers Conrad the opportunity to analyse the dynamics of greed. The plan to exploit Sotillo's greed is conceived by Nostromo and executed by Dr. Monygham. Ironically, Nostromo's insight into the effects the plan will have on Sotillo also indicates how the same treasure is infecting Nostromo, too:

> Nostromo had paused; then began again in a changed tone, sombre, speaking to himself as though he had forgotten the doctor's existence.

> "There is something in a treasure that fastens upon a man's mind. He will pray and blaspheme and still persevere, and will curse the day he ever heard of it, and will let his last hour come upon him unawares, still believing that he missed it only by a foot. He will see it every time he closes his eyes. He will never forget it till he is dead— and even then— Doctor, did you ever hear of the miserable gringos on Azuera, that cannot die? Ha! ha! Sailors like myself. There is no getting away from a treasure that once fastens upon your mind."(460)

Nostromo's plan is ingenious and effective, and his explanation of its rationale here is a stroke of genius, for it shows how indifference to God coincides with the corruptive influence of greed. The greedy man, he says, prays and blasphemes and curses indiscriminately. Nostromo's mention of his also being a sailor, like the gringos, evokes laughter from him, but emphasizes thereby how Nostromo's own impiety and lack of moral principle make him eminently susceptible to the silver's curse.

Unlike Nostromo, Colonel Sotillo, and the gringos, Charles Gould, whose life is bound to the San Tomé mine from beginning to end and the lives of whose descendants, if he had had any, would have been too, is immune to the infectious powers of greed. Conrad's analysis of Gould's motivation involves a careful consideration of the way Charles and Emilia Gould started together to make something of the mine and shows how their lives slowly diverge as Charles becomes increasingly immersed in developing the mine while abandoning his wife to the altruism with which they had both been driven from the first. Conrad begins with an account of the origin of the Gould Concession and of the fatal consequences that gift of a cunning and greedy Costaguana government had for Mr. Gould, senior. Although the mine was in a state of disrepair and could therefore not be worked profitably, the government decided it could use the simple prospect that the mine still contained immense wealth to extort from Mr. Gould, senior, every-

thing he had. Mr. Gould loses sleep, becomes feverish, suffers from liver pains and generally becomes so obsessed with the curse of the Gould Concession that he can think of nothing else. Conrad's dramatization of the manner in which the curse is passed on to young Charles Gould shows how Gould's mind works and reveals how closely he resembles the typical adolescent; but Conrad does much more than assert that he took an interest in the mine simply because it was prohibited. The sheer power of the silver on Mr. Gould, senior, provokes "such a tumult of words and passion"(58) in his letters to his son that Charles is captivated by the prospect of the mine and begins to study the latest mining techniques with a view to transforming the accursed mine into a success. By the time his father dies, Charles is so interested in the San Tomé mine and his newly-inherited Gould Concession that he naturally fastens onto that mine as the primary object around which his future will revolve:

> It hurt Charles Gould to feel that never more, by no effort of will, would he be able to think of his father in the same way he used to think of him when the poor man was alive. His breathing image was no longer in his power. This consideration, closely affecting his own identity, filled his breast with a mournful and angry desire for action. In this his instinct was unerring. Action is consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions. Only in the conduct of our action can we find the sense of mastery over the Fates. For his action, the mine was obviously the only field. It was imperative sometimes to know how to disobey the solemn wishes of the dead. He resolved firmly to make his disobedience as thorough (by way of atonement) as it well could be. The mine had been the cause of an absurd moral disaster; its working must be made a serious and moral success. He owed it to the dead man's memory. Such were the—properly speaking—emotions of Charles Gould.(65-66)

Gould's sense of loss evolves into a thirst for action; the nature of the action presents itself instinctively as a function of his mind's fixation on the Gould Concession; and the disobedience is transformed

into an act of atonement, which Gould attempts to justify in vague terms that are simply the negation of the terms used to describe what happened to his father. He resolves to make the "absurd moral disaster" that overtook the mine and killed his father into a "serious and moral success" by developing the mine in the best way he knows how. The mental process Conrad describes here is not at all rational, but his account of Gould's arriving at his emotional resolution to achieve his moral success shows the process to be very plausible and compelling. There is not a hint of greed in Gould's motives; on the contrary, his actions are defined as the performance of a life-long religious rite.

Conrad points out how the Goulds' love for each other became strongest when the death of Mr. Gould, senior, overtook them, thereby making their common resolution to rehabilitate the mine all the more powerful and enthralling:

> These two young people remembered the life which had ended wretchedly just when their own lives had come together in that splendour of hopeful love, which to the most sensible minds appears like a triumph of good over all the evils of the earth. A vague idea of rehabilitation had entered the plan of their life. That it was so vague as to elude the support of argument made it only the stronger.(74)

Their impulse is not even articulated until after Gould has discussed the future of the mine with Holroyd and received the American financier's commitment to back the venture:

> "What is wanted here [says Charles Gould] is law, good faith, order, security. Anyone can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. That's how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards. That's your ray of hope."(84)

What Charles Gould does not understand is that, as Dr. Monygham points out to Mrs. Gould much later, the development of material interests can never bring peace, since those interests are founded on expedience and are basically inhuman. But the moral strength of the Goulds, vague though their conception of moral success is, prevents the material interests from becoming an end in themselves. Once Gould begins to develop the mine efficiently, a greater degree of stability is possible than the people of the area ever experienced before: the workers of the mine are immune to police harassment and conscription into the army and, as Conrad notes, "Security seemed to flow upon this land from the mountain-gorge"(110). This security is threatened by the army of Pedro Montero, but it is the decisive leadership of Charles Gould that ensures Montero's defeat, and, significantly, the miners voluntarily take up arms to defend the society Gould has used his silver to establish.

At the end of the novel, Conrad shows the Goulds to have grown apart; they have no children and are not likely to have any, and there is trouble brewing among the miners, who, says Dr. Monygham, would never again take up arms on behalf of El Rey de Sulaco. The greed of the workers themselves fastens onto the silver and endangers the political stability that had made their own prosperity possible. Like Decoud, Conrad believes Gould to be a sentimentalist who has little to show for all his high idealism but a broken marriage and the prospect of a socialist or communist revolt led by his own miners. In probably the best essay written on Nostromo, Robert Penn Warren claims that in spite of all the dark ironies that undercut the success of Charles Gould and his idealism, "We must admit that the society at the end of the book is preferable to that at the beginning."[5] But Conrad himself

appears not to recognize this fact; his treatment of Gould, to whom the society owes most, claims that Gould has lost sight of his high ideals and has become obsessed with the economic success of the mine, when in fact the stability and order Gould wished to establish have actually been established, and his work to maintain what he has struggled so long to accomplish continues to occupy him. Dr. Monygham's analysis of the future of the new republic and Mrs. Gould's reaction to that analysis are far more pessimistic than a precise judgment of Charles Gould would have allowed:

> "Will there be never any peace? Will there be no rest?" Mrs. Gould whispered. "I thought that we—"
> "No!" interrupted the doctor. "There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle. Mrs. Gould, the time approaches when all that the Gould Concession stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and misrule of a few years back."
> "How can you say that, Dr. Monygham?" she cried out, as if hurt in the most sensitive place of her soul.
> "I can say what is true," the doctor insisted, obstinately. "It'll weigh as heavily, and provoke resentment, bloodshed, and vengeance, because the men have grown different. Do you think that now the mine would march upon the town to save their Señor Administrador? Do you think that?"
> She pressed the backs of her entwined hands on her eyes and murmured hopelessly—
> "Is it this we have worked for, then?"
> The doctor lowered his head. He could follow her silent thought. Was it for this that her life had been robbed of all the intimate felicities of daily affection which her tenderness needed as the human body needs air to breathe? And the doctor, indignant with Charles Gould's blindness, hastened to change the conversation.(511-12)

Mrs. Gould's despair is more fully dramatized in the novel's closing scene where she takes the only step she can to deny utterly the very existence of the silver—as if this were possible. If Warren's assessment of the possibilities for life in the new republic is accurate, Conrad's, as presented here through Dr. Monygham, must be in error, for it is clearly an attempt to deny that material interests

can be employed to good purpose.

That Dr. Monygham serves as Conrad's mouthpiece here is apparent from the prominence Conrad grants him following Decoud's departure from the scene. His heroic conquest of Colonel Sotillo earns him that position of prominence and invests him with a good deal of authority, and that Mrs. Gould, the one character whose moral standards are higher even than those of her husband, accepts the doctor's assessment is further evidence that Conrad encourages his reader to believe it too. Yet Dr. Monygham's judgment of the future likely to await the Goulds and their enterprise is clearly illogical and contradicts the moral progress of the mine that Conrad has so carefully dramatized. The doctor says that "there is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests." This is certainly true; Charles Gould's efforts to bring order and justice to the area through the Gould Concession are certainly not at an end once the new political order is established. If that order is to be maintained, Gould must continue to work for it. Dr. Monygham continues, noting that material interests are inhuman and lack the continuity and force that can be found only in moral principle, but he states the case as if moral principles and material interests were totally incompatible, a belief the events of the novel so far have shown to be false. He proceeds to assert, with the utmost sincerity and seriousness, that the moral principles with which the Goulds were armed when they came to Sulaco are now powerless to govern the greed of the miners and that failure is the only prospect. On the other hand, Charles Gould does not deserve to be worshipped for his achievement; but it is wrong to claim that his life has been a failure or that moral principle and material interests are incompatible. Surely it is far better that material wealth be developed by persons

of principle than that it be left to the Sotillos, the Monteros, and the Guzman Bentos of the world, and Nostromo effectively demonstrates this point. It is indeed unfortunate that Monygham and Conrad offer a final judgment of the Goulds' efforts that is interesting and engaging more for its cynicism than for its truthfulness.

Charles Gould's motives are tainted from the first by his forced partnership with Holroyd, the San Francisco financier who has elevated material interests into a religion he claims is a new form of Christianity. The Goulds' discussion of Holroyd's motives is an effective indictment of Holroyd, and the manner of its presentation brings out the essential differences not only between Holroyd and the Goulds, but between Mr. and Mrs. Gould as well:

> "Mr. Holroyd's sense of religion," Mrs. Gould pursued, "was shocked and disgusted at the tawdriness of the dressed-up saints in the cathedral—the worship, he called it, of wood and tinsel. But it seemed to me that he looked upon his own God as a sort of influential partner, who gets his share of profits in the endowment of churches. That's a sort of idolatry. He told me he endowed churches every year, Charley."
>
> "No end of them," said Mr. Gould, marvelling inwardly at the mobility of her physiognomy. "All over the country. He's famous for that sort of munificence."
>
> "Oh, he didn't boast," Mrs. Gould declared, scrupulously. "I believe he's really a good man, but so stupid! A poor Chulo who offers a little silver arm or leg to thank his god for a cure is as rational and more touching."
>
> "He's at the head of immense silver and iron interests," Charles Gould observed.
>
> "Ah, yes! The religion of silver and iron. He's a very civil man, though he looked awfully solemn when he first saw the Madonna on the staircase, who's only wood and paint; but he said nothing to me. My dear Charley, I heard those men talk among themselves. Can it be that they really wish to become, for an immense consideration, drawers of water and hewers of wood to all the countries and nations of the earth?"
>
> "A man must work to some end," Charles Gould said, vaguely.(71)

Holroyd religiously pursues his financial interests, and he pays homage to his version of the Christian tradition by building more churches, and he finds his reasons for living as he does in the money

he makes, not in traditional Christian values. The Christianity he supports has no room for spiritual considerations: he cannot understand that when the common people pay homage to the saints in the cathedral they are doing something quite other than worshipping wood and tinsel. In Holroyd's Christianity, Holroyd himself becomes the ultimate source of grace, and the pursuit of riches the highest possible form of activity.

Charles Gould never becomes a worshipper of silver, but his association with Holroyd makes him uncomfortable in scrutinizing Holroyd's motives and encourages him to be all the vaguer about his own moral ideals. Throughout this exchange, Mrs. Gould analyses Holroyd disinterestedly, but her husband's statements, which provide her with the impetus she needs to proceed to her conclusion, betray a striking lack of interest. His first comment's lack of seriousness is underscored by Conrad's indication that Gould's interest is more in his wife's unusual facial contortions than in what she says; his second comment simply picks up the word "silver" from her and uses it as the basis of a remark that is little more than free association—a remark that she in turn analyses with damning precision; and his third comment concludes the argument with a feeble generalization that asserts the dangers inherent in a commitment to the development of material interests. The strategically placed "vaguely" effectively exposes Gould's own refusal to acknowledge those very dangers. The events that take place later, however, demonstrate that Gould is sufficiently capable of coping with those dangers to propose the total destruction of the mine when military force threatens the success of his dream and to ride out to the mine at the novel's end to deal with worker unrest. Mrs. Gould's knowledge of the dangers inherent in

the development of the mine is complete, but it causes her so to bind herself to her ideals that she cannot face the necessity of dirtying her hands with material interests if her goals are to be achieved, and she ends up hating the mine and all its wealth. She, not her husband, is the greater sentimentalist, for her ideals are so high she cannot bear to see them tainted by the silver required to realize them.

The analysis of Holroyd is only one instance of the many where Conrad explores the relationship between religious fervor and greed: such connections are made throughout the novel, from the legend of the gringos on Azuera to the protestant missionaries Holroyd sends to Sulaco and Father Corbelan's elevation to the rank of Cardinal—a measure taken by the Pope to counterbalance the growing protestant influence. Father Corbelan refuses to accept a bishopric from the government of Costaguana unless the church's secular power and its confiscated property are restored; he recognizes, as Mrs. Gould does not, that one must engage oneself in material interests if one is to have a significant moral influence. Signora Viola's dying words are a plea to Nostromo to bring her a priest and advice to him to "Get riches at least for once"(256)—advice that he follows to his death. Even the Indians who work the mine perform their work as if it were an act of worship:

> In a very few years the sense of belonging to a powerful organization had been developed in these harassed, half-wild Indians. They were proud of, and attached to, the mine. It had secured their confidence and belief. They invested it with a protecting and invincible virtue as though it were a fetish made by their own hands, for they were ignorant, and in other respects did not differ appreciably from the rest of mankind which puts infinite trust in its own creations.(398)

The pious Hernandez, who confesses regularly to Father Corbelan and who, after the founding of the Occidental Republic, goes to mass three

times a day, is perhaps the only character whose religious fervor after the counterrevolution is pure, but his life before that as a notorious bandit demonstrates that he, like Father Corbelan, Mrs. Viola, and others, has made some compromises with his Christian ideals to enable him to live in the same world as the evil he must fight. Unlike Holroyd, however, these characters manage to exercise control over the evil with which they are embattled instead of allowing it to take control over them.

In a long speech comparing the motives of Charles Gould and Holroyd, the chief engineer remarks to Dr. Monygham:

> "Upon my word, doctor, things seem to be worth nothing by what they are in themselves. I begin to believe that the only solid thing about them is the spiritual value which everyone discovers in his own form of activity—"(318)

All the characters in Nostromo, like the Goulds, act according to their own moral principles, whether those principles are based on vague ideals or traditional values; those who act simply out of greed or selfishness are likewise acting out their own perverse, immoral values. In every case, the characters exist as performers of action—indeed, as Aristotle said of characters in tragedy, they are a function of the action they perform, since they are portrayed only as performers of that action; that action is therefore the embodiment of each character's moral principles. Colonel Sotillo travels to Sulaco to capture the silver and win the favor of General Montero so that the ruthless General will spare his life; Dr. Monygham stalls Sotillo with lies in an attempt to save Sulaco and the Goulds from the Colonel's insanity; Nostromo guides the silver-laden lighter to safety and rides to Cayta for Barrios simply to gain more praise from the the people; the various government officials of Costaguana bleed the Gould Concession for all it is worth. These actions are all

examples of characters acting out their moral principles, or lack of them.

The point is made emphatically in the case of Decoud, who commits suicide because he feels that, alone on the Great Isabel with the silver, he is powerless to act. Here is Conrad's account of Decoud's surrender to despair:

> He spent the night open-eyed, and when the day broke he ate something with the same indifference. The brilliant "Son Decoud," the spoiled darling of the family, the lover of Antonia and journalist of Sulaco, was not fit to grapple with himself single-handed. Solitude from mere outward condition of existence becomes very swiftly a state of soul in which the affectations of irony and scepticism have no place. It takes possession of the mind, and drives forth the thought into the exile of utter unbelief. After three days of waiting for the sight of some human face, Decoud caught himself entertaining a doubt of his own individuality. It had merged into the world of cloud and water, of natural forces and forms of nature. In our activity alone do we find the sustaining illusion of an independent existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part. Decoud lost all belief in the reality of his action past and to come. On the fifth day an immense melancholy descended upon him palpably. He resolved not to give himself up to these people in Sulaco, who had beset him, unreal and terrible, like jibbering and obscene spectres. He saw himself struggling feebly in their midst, and Antonia, gigantic and lovely like an allegorical statue, looking on with scornful eyes at his weakness.
>
> Not a living being, not a speck of distant sail, appeared within the range of his vision; and, as if to escape from this solitude, he absorbed himself in his melancholy. The vague consciousness of a misdirected life given up to impulses whose memory left a bitter taste in his mouth was the first moral sentiment of his manhood. But at the same time he felt no remorse. What should he regret? He had recognized no other virtue than intelligence, and had erected passions into duties. Both his intelligence and his passion were swallowed up easily in this great unbroken solitude of waiting without faith. Sleeplessness had robbed his will of all energy, for he had not slept seven hours in the seven days. His sadness was the sadness of a sceptical mind. He beheld the universe as a succession of incomprehensible images. Nostromo was dead. Everything had failed ignominiously. He no longer dared to think of Antonia. She had not survived. But if she survived he could not face her. And all exertion seemed senseless.(497-98)

Like Axel Heyst, Decoud all along sets himself completely apart from

the human world. The crucial difference is that Decoud's intelligence is so cynical and his scepticism so complete that he performs actions spontaneously, but only because he enjoys the feeling of his own impulses: he has nothing more compelling in which to believe; on the other hand, Heyst retains his basic human sense of compassion and his impulses lead him back into the community. With the sentimental naivete one finds in the worst of Shelley, Decoud surrenders to his own melancholy: a truly appropriate act for someone who has been the slave of his passions all along. He worships Antonia, not for herself, but for the passion she arouses in him, and he masterminds the separatist movement simply with a view to preserving that passion. Those days alone on the island cause him to lose touch with Antonia and with the passion he had for her; as a result, he has no remaining bond with the rational world and his melancholy gains control over his intelligence. He becomes incapable of performing any action whatever, except that by which he believes he can escape forever from the distress of solitude. He has no faith in anything or anyone, nothing has value, and so he does nothing, at least not for a while.

Conrad describes Decoud as "the dilettante in life" who "imagined himself to derive an artistic pleasure from watching the picturesque extreme of wrong-headedness into which an honest, almost sacred, conviction may drive a man"(200). Like the elder Heyst, Decoud has an only superficial interest in life: he has no stake in anything except his own passions. As a detached observer, he has the freedom to condemn all moral principle, simply because he has none himself. Since on the Great Isabel there is no one to observe but himself, and since he believes the only decisive and observable action he can perform is suicide, his death is shown to be the inevitable result of his lack of

principle:

> The great gulf burst into a glitter all around the boat; and in this glory of merciless solitude the silence appeared again before him, stretched taut like a dark, thin string.
>
> His eyes looked at it while, without haste, he shifted his seat from the thwart to the gunwale. They looked at it fixedly, while his hand, feeling about his waist, unbuttoned the flap of the leather case, drew the revolver, cocked it, brought it forward pointing at his breast, pulled the trigger, and, with convulsive force, sent the still-smoking weapon hurtling through the air. His eyes looked at it while he fell forward and hung with his breast on the gunwhale and the fingers of his right hand hooked under the thwart. They looked—
>
> "It is done," he stammered out, in a sudden flow of blood. His last thought was: "I wonder how that Capataz died."(500-01)

The eyes and the hands perform all the action here, and it is as if Decoud's consciousness is separate from his own body. Even to the end, his eyes stare at the smoking revolver, and his final thought about Nostromo's death indicates that he is as dissociated from his own death as he is from the death of someone else; both have an equally superficial interest for the dilettante in life.

When Decoud is involved in the political life of the community, however, his devotion to Antonia and his belief only in "the truth of his own sensations" are enough to move him to constructive action and to invest that action with an intense spiritual value. And his intelligence and command of the language enable him to define precisely the action he does take, to explain its motives and possible consequences, and to analyse the feeling accompanying that action. He is in the curious position of being, at one and the same time, a disinterested observer and a passionate participant, for even when under the influence of Antonia's charm he is able to view his own feelings with absolute detachment. His skill as a journalist is portrayed principally as a knack for disseminating propaganda, but his intelligence is demonstrated in his conversation generally, the most significant evidence of this

being the long letter to his sister where Decoud dramatizes the populace's rioting and the province's leaders paralyzed by fear as word of the Monterist victory arrives from Santa Marta. His portrait of the defeated Don José Avellanos is a remarkable example of how Conrad, when at his best, can make the narration of action at once a dramatization and an analysis without intruding authorially, while revealing with convincing immediacy the intelligence of his narrator:

> "I walked up to the table blindly, as though I had been drunk. 'You are deliberating upon surrender,' I said. They all sat still, with their noses over the sheet of paper each had before him, God only knows why. Only Don José hid his face in his hands, muttering, 'Never, never!' But as I looked at him, it seemed to me that I could have blown him away with my breath, he looked so frail, so weak, so worn out. Whatever happens, he will not survive. The deception is too great for a man of his age; and hasn't he seen the sheets of 'Fifty Years of Misrule,' which we have begun printing on the presses of the Porvenir, littering the Plaza, floating in the gutters, fired out as wads for trabucos loaded with handfuls of type, blown in the wind, trampled in the mud? I have seen pages floating upon the very waters of the harbour. It would be unreasonable to expect him to survive. It would be cruel. . . ."(235)

Decoud then explains how he tried to arouse the assembled parliamentarians to action "with all the passion of my love for Antonia," and continues:

> "My dear girl, I absolutely thundered at them. It seemed as if my voice would burst the walls asunder, and when I stopped I saw all their scared eyes looking at me dubiously. And that was all the effect I produced! Only Don José's head had sunk lower and lower on his breast. I bent my ear to his withered lips, and made out his whisper, something like, 'In God's name, then, Martin, my son!' I don't know exactly. There was the name of God in it, I am certain. It seems to me I have caught his last breath—the breath of his departing soul upon his lips. . . ."(236)

Decoud fully realizes that Don José's dream of a new liberal order of freedom and justice is shattered along with the presses of the Porvenir and that words offer but feeble opposition to the guns of Montero; he dramatizes all this eloquently in his description of the fate of "Fifty

Years of Misrule": both the paper it is printed on and the type used to print it are employed not for what the book says, but for ammunition. His transformation of Don José's book brilliantly expresses his understanding of the impotence of the printed word and of reason itself amidst the harsh political realities of Costaguana. This account is further embellished by Découd's portrait of the do-nothing politicians, the extent of whose hypocrisy and cowardice Decoud himself had not realized before; their attempt to offer responsible government to the province lacks the moral commitment required to resist the approaching troops. As he leaves the room, Decoud takes up what he believes Don José to have whispered and uses it to explain what he is about to do: "'There is never any God,'" he exclaims, "'in a country where men will not help themselves'"(237). What the old man really whispered to Decoud is never revealed, but, given the man's longstanding dedication to his liberal ideals it is extremely unlikely that he would encourage Decoud, with his dying breath, to separate from Costaguana and forever deny Don José's dream of liberation for the entire country. But Decoud's God is his passion for Antonia, and the action he takes to advance the cause of separation is done simply to enable that passion to flourish as it could not under a continuation of military dictatorship. He is right, of course, when he says there is no God where men will not help themselves: men who lack the conviction to defend their beliefs cannot be said truly to believe in anything at all; but his own peculiar sensibility dictates that although he has the necessary passion to drive him to decisive action, he, too, lacks moral conviction.

Conrad's condemnation of Decoud's dilettantism and cynicism is uncompromisingly realized in the portrait of Decoud's moral disintegration on the Great Isabel, but that judgment is qualified by a sincere

respect for Decoud's intelligence and capacity for judgment. Yet two of the most important critics to have written on Nostromo agree that Decoud's cynical attitude to life is perilously close to Conrad's own. Decoud's consciousness, says F. R. Leavis, "seems to permeate [Nostromo], even to dominate it."[6] In fact, he continues, "Decoud may be said to have had a considerable part in the writing of Nostromo."[7] Albert J. Guerard, Jr., claims that, "The characterization [of Decoud] obviously belongs with those in which a writer attempts to condemn himself by proxy."[8] These propositions are supported by the knowledge of Conrad's inclination to make human life seem more hopeless than it is, an inclination that, in this novel, leads him to imply that material interests and moral principles belong in separate worlds. There is indeed much of Conrad in Decoud, just as there is much of Conrad in Heyst, but Conrad ought to be praised to his ability to recognize his own dangerous tendency toward romanticism and nihilism for what it is and for the brilliant manner in which he employs his art to condemn that tendency. If Decoud is one aspect of Conrad's consciousness, surely Captain Mitchell is another, and to emphasize the presence of the former at the expense of the latter is to distort the balanced conception of the novel—a conception that owes its success, in part, to a juxtaposing of narrative perspectives. The intelligent vitality of Decoud's narrative in the letter to his sister and of his casual but serious analyses of political realities in polite conversation is counterbalanced by the superficial, platitudinous survey of Sulaco's history offered by Captain Mitchell. Where Conrad's judgment of Decoud condemns his detachment and praises his intelligence, his judgment of Mitchell praises his sense of responsibility and ridicules his dullness.

Captain Mitchell is the first inhabitant of Sulaco Conrad introduces, and his position as superintendent of the Costaguana section of the O. S. N.'s service renders him worthy of considerable admiration, since the O. S. N.'s reputation for reliability, Conrad indicates, is at least partially due to Mitchell's management. Mitchell also deserves respect for his choice of Nostromo as the leader of his cargadores. Conrad's introduction of Mitchell is in exactly the right tone to express a truly accurate judgment of the captain, and it serves, at the same time, to introduce, almost casually, Costaguana's inclination to coups d'etat:

> "Our excellent Señor Mitchell" for the business and official world of Sulaco; "Fussy Joe" for the commanders of the Company's ships, Captain Joseph Mitchell prided himself on his profound knowledge of men and things in the country—cosas de Costaguana. Among these last he accounted as most unfavourable to the orderly working of his Company the frequent changes of government brought about by revolutions of the military type.(10-11)

The disparity between the tones of Mitchell's two titles expresses perfectly the disparity between his high estimation of his own intelligence and his inability to see beneath the appearances of things; his knowledge of men and things in the country is eminently pragmatic, but certainly not profound. "Our excellent Señor Mitchell" is the proper form of address to this man who is, whatever his faults, a key to the economic life of the Occidental Province; "Fussy Joe," a humorous, indulgent form of address to a superior, pokes fun at Mitchell's often excessive concern for order, but at the same time is a reminder of how important his ability to maintain order is to the company and the community. Mitchell's "profound knowledge of men and things in the country" is not nearly so profound as he thinks it is, but he does know that revolutions can and do seriously disrupt the conduct of his company's business. The "most unfavourable," a

typically proper, gentlemanly Mitchellism, clearly indicates that Mitchell's assessment of the dangers posed by the military revolution is extremely myopic, yet Conrad's realization of the importance of the O. S. N. to orderly life in the province emphasizes that Mitchell's assessment is, none the less, a significant one.

In addition to being an indication of Mitchell's own idiosyncrasies, Mitchell's extended narrative of the events of the separatist movement is also meant to be representative of the historical perspectives held by most of the area's important citizens, all of whom are members of the Amarilla Club. Consider his account of the ritual connected with the delivery of the Très de Mayo coffee:

> "Try a weed with your coffee. Local tobacco. The black coffee you get at the Amarilla, sir, you don't meet anywhere in the world. We get the bean from a famous cafeteria in the foot-hills, whose owner sends three sacks every year as a present to his fellow members in remembrance of the fight against Gamacho's Nationals, carried on from these very windows by the caballeros. He was in town at the time, and took part, sir, to the bitter end. It arrives on three mules—not in the common way, by rail; no fear!—right into the patio, escorted by mounted peons, in charge of the Mayoral of his estate, who walks upstairs, booted and spurred, and delivers it to our committee formally with the words, 'For the sake of those fallen the third of May.' We call it Très de Mayo coffee. Taste it."
>
> Captain Mitchell, with an expression as though making ready to hear a sermon in a church, would lift the tiny cup to his lips. And the nectar would be sipped to the bottom during a restful silence in a cloud of cigar smoke.(479-80)

The formal dedication of the coffee to "those fallen the third of May" indicates the great respect held for the men who gave their lives for the republic, and that respect is endowed with a truly religious significance in the description of Mirchell's performance of the ritual connected with the precious nectar. Although Mitchell's own character lends a touch of the ridiculous to the proceeding, Conrad includes an earlier episode that indicates the ritual is performed with the utmost seriousness by all of those involved. He shows Mitchell

conducting his distinguished visitor through the cathedral and pointing to the bust of Don José Avellanos, in a niche where one would expect to find the statue of a saint, and to the marble medallion dedicated to Martin Decoud. That these things are where they are demonstrates that even the Catholic church sanctions the reverence with which people view the significance of those who have died in the battle for independence and republican government.

There is, in Mitchell's account of the ritual associated with the coffee, yet another comment on the nature of the changes wrought in the republic during the years following the counterrevolution. "'It arrives,'" he says, "'on three mules—not in the common way, by rail; no fear!—right into the patio, escorted by mounted peons. . . .'" The nature of life in the area has been altered substantially by the advent of the railway; transportation by rail is now commonplace, and mules simply a relic of a rustic past. Not only has the construction of the railway changed the complexion of life in the new republic, but technological advances generally have played a significant role in the entire history of the region: Nostromo's ride to Cayta was made possible by the presence of the section of rail line into the mountains (which Mitchell then viewed as a wonderful novelty); from Charles Gould's employment of new mining techniques to the completion of the lighthouse on the Great Isabel, technology is shown to have had a profound influence on the development of the area. In fact, the development of steam power as a means of propelling ships and cargo is responsible for establishing the port of Sulaco before the novel opens: the placid waters and still air of the gulf had up to that time rendered the harbor inaccessible to commercial sailing ships.

Technology is far more important to the history of the republic

than simply as the means of developing and transporting natural resources to market. The ultimate success of the counterrevolution depends not only on Nostromo's ability to speed into the mountains on the locomotive, but also on the superior firepower that Decoud's new rifles gave to the troops of Colonel Barrios:

> "Standing under that very gateway, sir, with some young engineer-fellows, ready to defend that house where we had received so much kindness and hospitality, I saw the first and last charge of Pedrito's horsemen upon Barrios's troops, who had just taken the Harbour Gate. They could not stand the new rifles brought out by that poor Decoud. It was a murderous fire. In a moment the street became blocked with a mass of dead men and horses. They never came on again."(476)

Neither Mitchell nor Conrad belabor the point here or elsewhere, but the significance technological developments have in the events of the novel is indisputable, rendered all the more powerful because it is poignantly true to life: historically, technological progress does accompany the development of material interests and the struggle for stable government.

Conrad's brief characterization of Sir John shows that what George Grant calls the drive for human mastery over nature[9] was not only a serious interest in the means of obtaining material wealth in the early days of the twentieth century, but a moral condition that paves the way for the realization of freedom in greed. Sir John, the president of the railway board, is noted for "all the indifference of a man of affairs to nature, whose hostility can always be overcome by the resources of finance"(39) and for the belief that technology can tackle anything men of means want it to. In a conversation with Mrs. Gould, he exposes his ignorance of what technology is displacing, in a manner reminiscent of Holroyd and his new Christianity:

> "We can't give you your ecclesiastical court back again; but you shall have more steamers, a railway, a telegraph-

> cable—a future in the great world which is worth infinitely more than any amount of ecclesiastical past. You shall be brought in touch with something greater than two viceroyalties. But I had no notion that a place on a seacoast could remain so isolated from the world. If it had been a thousand miles inland now—most remarkable! Has anything ever happened here for a hundred years before. today?"(36)

Sir John's enthusiastic support of "the religion of progress"[10] blinds him to the possibility that Sulaco may have lost something valuable in the passing of the ecclesiastical courts and the viceroyalties; for him, history begins with the age of progress, and piety has no relevance. Although Captain Mitchell's job, his whole company in fact, owe their existence and prosperity to modern technology, Mitchell is able to appreciate the value of what technological advances have replaced, and it is the rite of the three mules and the sacks of coffee beans that makes the point so concisely.

The reverence with which Mitchell and others regard the historical personages of the republic's recent past is circumscribed by the ironies involved in Conrad's attitude toward Captain Mitchell. That reverence is understandable and respectable enough in itself: such feeling is also reflected in plaques and monuments throughout North America and Europe that are dedicated to the remembrance of those who lost their lives in the two World Wars. But Conrad's presentation of Mitchell's historical perspective also serves as a reminder that many people never bother, or are unable, to investigate events beyond their mere appearances:

> The next day was quiet in the morning, except for the faint sound of firing to the northward, in the direction of Los Hatos. Captain Mitchell had listened to it from his balcony anxiously. The phrase, "In my delicate position as the only consular agent then in port, everything, sir, everything was a just cause for anxiety," had its place in the more or less stereotyped relation of the "historical events" which for the next few years was at the service of distinguished strangers visiting Sulaco. The mention of the dignity and neutrality

> of the flag, so difficult to preserve in his position, "right in the thick of these events between the lawlessness of that piratical villain Sotillo and the more regularly established but scarcely less atrocious tyranny of his Excellence Don Pedro Montero," came next in order. Captain Mitchell was not the man to enlarge upon mere dangers much. But he insisted that it was a memorable day. On that day, towards dusk, he had seen "that poor fellow of mine—Nostromo. The sailor whom I discovered, and, I may say, made, sir. The man of the famous ride to Cayta, sir. An historical event, sir!"(473)

In Mitchell's mouth phrases like "historical events" and "memorable day" are clichés worthy of the superficial mind that makes a habit of using them. He is incapable of analysing the events concerned and of saying exactly what he means by "historical," and so he uses simple rhetorical techniques, like the repetition of "sir," to convey to his listener the illusion that what he is saying is of immense importance; but Conrad's ironic tone dissolves that illusion for the reader and exposes Mitchell's pomposity. The irony of "Captain Mitchell was not the man to enlarge upon mere dangers much" is an effective criticism of Mitchell's perspective as mere observer and is rendered all the more effective when one recalls his total ignorance of the dangers posed by Colonel Sotillo, even when those threats are to Mitchell's own life. But just as, in the above passage, Mitchell's point of view is made respectable by his standing as a responsible public person, so is his blindness to the danger he faces as Sotillo's prisoner counterbalanced by Conrad's admiration for him as a competent seaman. Mitchell's confrontation with Colonel Sotillo is dramatized to make Mitchell look ridiculous: Mitchell is aghast when he finds himself bound hand and foot because Sotillo feared he was maneuvering himself toward Sotillo's revolver so he could overpower his captor and regain his freedom. Mitchell's absurd obsession with the theft of his watch by Sotillo's men and his obliviousness to all danger makes such a move unthinkable. Yet the reader is not left, even in this scene,

without some reason for admiring Mitchell; the gold watch that Mitchell is so concerned about was his reward for rescuing from fire a ship for which he was responsible—an act which proves his competence as a commander. Mitchell of course is incapable of being affected by the treasure that exerts such a powerful influence over nearly everyone else in the novel. He is content with the knowledge that he carried out his duties responsibly and that he was able to witness the famous historical events. His only personal connection with the mine is the seventeen shares he possesses, from which he is able to accumulate a respectable inheritance he can leave to his niece.

It is otherwise with Nostromo, the dramatization of whose fate rounds out the novel. From the beginning of the Goulds' enterprise, Nostromo identifies the success of the mine with his own personal success in winning the esteem of the people of Sulaco. This identification is dramatized in the scene where one of Nostromo's female admirers causes a public scene and will not believe Nostromo still loves her until he gives her a token of his love. Although it is obvious he does not love the girl, Nostromo offers ostentatiously to have her cut the silver buttons from his coat, thereby making a proud spectacle of his generosity and affection. That he is mounted, all the while, on a silver-grey mare intensifies the identification of silver with Nostromo's personal quest for increased esteem. In Decoud's letter to his sister, Decoud comments that "The only thing [Nostromo] seems to care for, as far as I have been able to discover, is to be well spoken of"(246), and the letter includes an account of how the two of them walked together, talking of Nostromo's meeting with an old woman to whom he had given his last penny:

> "'Why did you do that?' I asked. 'Do you know her?'
> "'No, senor. I don't suppose I have ever seen her

> before. How should I? She has not probably been out in the streets for years. She is one of those old women that you find in this country at the back of huts, crouching over fireplaces, with a stick on the ground by their side, and almost too feeble to drive away the stray dogs from their cooking-pots. Caramba! I could tell by her voice that death had forgotten her. But, old or young, they like money, and will speak well of the man who gives it to them.'"(247)

Those people who, like the Goulds and Captain Mitchell, are not to be bought with his money, he buys with acts of heroism. Their admiration for his deeds is in turn expressed in their speaking well of him and in payment or gifts. In either case, Nostromo's reputation is inextricably linked to money, and like most of the wealth in the region, that money is most often in the form of silver from the San Tomé mine.

The silver is so often and so effectively used to express the nature of Nostromo's character that the silver comes to symbolize him. The epithet frequently ascribed to the "incorruptible" Nostromo is an adjective often used to describe the nature of the precious metal; ironically, Nostromo is shown to be corrupted by his contact with that very metal. With unremitting logic, Conrad demonstrates how Nostromo is gradually driven out of his mind and eventually destroyed by the secret hoard of silver on the Great Isabel. Like the gringos of Azuera, like Colonel Sotillo and the numerous military dictators and their lieutenants, Nostromo has no moral principles capable of controlling the greed that the treasure stimulates in him. The highest moral principle he ever has involves only his reputation, but to keep enhancing that reputation with the common people he needs more silver. Once the lighthouse is built on the island, he realizes his position as protector of the Viola family and savior of the republic would be jeopardized if he divulged his secret to Giorgio,

and yet he knows too that moving the silver from the island will be much more difficult once the lighthouse is operating, no matter who its keepers are. On the one hand, he needs the silver to maintain his reputation, but on the other, the publication of the dishonest and cowardly manner in which he came to possess the silver would destroy that very reputation.

Nostromo's fatal error is the immediate result of his inability to assert his preference for Giselle when he asks Giorgio for his daughter's hand in marriage. He travels to the lighthouse ostensibly for this purpose, but the real reason he decides to marry one of the girls is to establish a sound pretext for visiting the island publicly and often. Consider how he reacts when Giorgio calls for Linda to convey Nostromo's request to her:

> Her answer came sharp and faint from within; and the appalled Nostromo stood up, too, but remained mute, gazing at the door. He was afraid. He was not afraid of being refused the girl he loved—no mere refusal could stand between him and a woman he desired—but the shining spectre of the treasure rose before him, claiming his allegiance in a silence that could not be gainsaid. He was afraid, because, neither dead nor alive, like the Gringos on Azuera, he belonged body and soul to the unlawfulness of his audacity. He was afraid of being forbidden the island. He was afraid, and said nothing.(531)

The treasure has transformed his audacity into fear, and that fear is powerfully evoked in his total incapacity to speak or act. That he is described as afraid, five times in this short passage, combines with the reference to the gringos of Azuera and brings to bear all the accumulated power that has been invested in the silver as a symbol through its effect on all the other characters. The immensity of this power that has transformed Nostromo, the most courageous of men, into a coward like Señor Hirsch is all too real.

The action that follows Nostromo's accidental betrothal is

certainly melodramatic, but it is powerful and effective none the less. The total power of the novel's patterning is brought to bear on this concluding sequence of events, thereby rendering this tragic farce of mistaken identity, hidden treasure, and fatal shooting an acting out of the consequences of greed, and not a superficial exploitation of stock emotional response as is conventional melodrama. Conrad's playing off of Nostromo's love for Giselle against the spell of the treasure is particularly effective:

> "I love you! I love you!"
> These words gave him an unwonted sense of freedom; they cast a spell stronger than the accursed spell of the treasure; they changed his weary subjection to that dead thing into an exulting conviction of his power. He would cherish her, he said, in a splendour as great as Doña Emilia's. The rich lived on wealth stolen from the people, but he had taken from the rich nothing—nothing that was not lost to them already by their folly and their betrayal. For he had been betrayed—he said—deceived, tempted. She believed him. . . . He had kept the treasure for purposes of revenge; but now he cared nothing for it. He cared only for her. He would put her beauty in a palace on a hill crowned with olive trees—a white palace above a blue sea. He would keep her there like a jewel in a casket. He would get land for her—her own land fertile with vines and corn—to set her little feet upon. He kissed them. . . . He had already paid for it all with the soul of a woman and the life of a man. . . . The Capataz de Cargadores tasted the supreme intoxication of his generosity. He flung the mastered treasure at her feet in the impenetrable darkness of the gulf, in the darkness defying—as men said—the knowledge of God and the wit of the devil. But she must let him grow rich first—he warned her.(540-41)

Even with Giselle Nostromo feels that only his generosity can win him respect; the difference is that here he calls it love. The illusion of freedom he experiences after telling her he loves her is the result of "the supreme intoxication of his generosity," and that it is only an illusion is made clear at the end of the paragraph by his insistence that he must first become rich before he can marry her. He does not realize himself how far he is from mastering the treasure until she asks him to tell her where it is:

> "Not that! Not that!" he gasped out, appalled at the spell of secrecy that had kept him dumb before so many people falling upon his lips again with unimpaired force. Not even to her. Not even to her. It was too dangerous. "I forbid thee to ask," he cried at her, deadening cautiously the anger of his voice.
>
> He had not regained his freedom. The spectre of the unlawful treasure arose, standing by her side like a figure of silver, pitiless and secret with a finger on its pale lips. His soul died within him at the vision of himself creeping in presently along the ravine, with the smell of earth, of damp foliage in his nostrils—creeping in, determined in a purpose that numbed his breast, and creeping out again loaded with silver, with his ears alert to every sound. It must be done this very night—that work of a craven slave!(542)

The trap Nostromo's greed has caught him in is inescapable: he has no love except that which is a function of his own generosity and no values higher than a devotion to his own reputation.

In a March 7, 1923, letter to Ernst Bendz, Conrad wrote:

> I will take the liberty to point out that Nostromo has never been intended for the hero of the Tale of the Seaboard. Silver is the pivot of the moral and material events, affecting the lives of everybody in the tale.[10]

Although it would be far from illuminating to suggest that silver is the real hero of the novel, a final glimpse at the importance of silver in the novel will show how Conrad has created in this novel one of the most effective symbols in English literature. The silver of the San Tomé mine permeates the very atmosphere of Nostromo and profoundly influences the thinking and behavior of every character; the beauty of it is that it achieves its power by virtue of what silver actually is. The power of this symbol results from Conrad's insight into the nature of greed and the growing importance of riches as the modern substitute for God. The choice of silver as the symbol for greed is perfect because silver is wealth. In his blending together of the power of the San Tomé mine over the political life of the republic with the power of money to bring new technological development to the

region and thereby to alter the complexion of life, Conrad demonstrates a thorough understanding of the nature of material wealth. From the buttons on Nostromo's coat, the streak of silver in Mrs. Gould's hair, and the four ingots that sink Decoud's body to the ocean floor to the "big white cloud shining like a mass of solid silver" suspended ominously over the novel's closing scene there are symbolic overtones that unobtrusively reinforce the pervasive influence of silver over every aspect of the new Occidental Republic and over every person connected with the country's economic or political life. Using this powerfully effective symbolism as the backdrop for his moral drama, Conrad shows how difficult and yet how vital it is for the development of material wealth to be directed by men of principle, not men of greed.

Epilogue

In a now notorious assessment of Conrad written in 1921 in a review of Notes on Life and Letters, E. M. Forster contends that:

> What is so elusive about him is that he is always promising to make some general philosophic statement about the universe, and then refraining with a gruff disclaimer . . . . Is there not also a central obscurity, something noble, heroic, beautiful, inspiring half a dozen great books, but obscure, obscure? . . . These essays do suggest that he is misty in the middle as well as at the edges, that the secret casket of his genius contains a vapour rather than a jewel; that we needn't try to write him down philosophically, because there is, in this direction, nothing to write. No creed, in fact. Only opinions, and the right to throw them overboard when facts make them look absurd. Opinions held under the semblance of eternity, girt with the sea, crowned with stars, and therefore easily mistaken for a creed.[1]

He is right that some of Conrad's works are obscure, but he imprecisely uses the term "philosophically" when he denies Conrad has a "creed." The greatness of Conrad's method is that it is exploratory; like a true philosopher, he seeks truth. Forster disparages Conrad's having "only opinions and the right to throw them overboard when facts make them look absurd," but does Forster mean Conrad should tenaciously cling to a creed in spite of factual evidence against it?

Conrad's method is an intelligent artist's questioning the relevance to modern life of traditional values, and it does so by showing men who hold those values succeeding in a world that seriously challenges them. Conrad has no "creed" in Forster's sense, but his method lends his "opinions" far more weight than any such creed could have. Conrad holds conservative moral and political principles, and he submits those principles, in his fiction, to the challenge of a modern world that would deny them. The results show that a reliance on tradition does not deny man the opportunity to be sensitive to

contemporary life; in fact, they show that reliance on tradition is vital if man is to maintain a civilization that values human excellence.

Footnotes

Chapter I: The Philosophical Novelist

[1] The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and Typhoon & Other Stories (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1950), x. All subsequent references to Conrad's works are to the 1950 Dent Collected Edition.

[2] "Modern Fiction," Collected Essays, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), II, 106.

[3] Mimesis, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), 552.

[4] Ibid., 552, 553.

[5] Ibid., 553.

[6] On Tyranny (rev. ed., Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963), 225-26.

[7] "Nostromo," Sewanee Review, LIX (1951), 391.

[8] Although this novel has no subtitle labelling it a "tale," its title emphasizes that the experiences of Razumov presented in the novel are seen from a particular point of view and that this fact is one of Conrad's primary concerns.

[9] The Language of Fiction (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1966), 82.

[10] These beliefs are stated most concisely in the lines Razumov writes as he reflects on his turning Haldin over to the authorities:

> History not Theory.
> Patriotism not Internationalism.
> Evolution not Revolution.
> Direction not Destruction.
> Unity not Disruption.(66)

[11] Conrad the Novelist (1958; rpr. New York: Athenaeum, 1970), 126-27.

[12] This latter action is clearly a result of Jim's failure to learn from a previous mistake. Ever since he jumped from the Patna, he has been haunted by the shame it brought him, but instead of confronting the failure in himself that caused him to jump and perhaps taking measures to improve himself, Jim runs away to Patusan where, he thinks, he can simply leave the past behind him. All Gentleman Brown needs do to subdue Jim when Jim has him cornered is to utter the word "jump" and Jim goes all to pieces.

[13] Letters from Joseph Conrad, 1895-1924, ed. Edward Garnett (London: Nonesuch Press, 1928), 172.

[14]Henry James: Selected Literary Criticism, ed. Morris Shapira (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968), 379.

[15]Ibid., 80.

Chapter II: Heart of Darkness: The Ascendancy of Judgment

[1]In his well-known "Apology for Marlow"(From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad, ed. R. C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann, Jr., [Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1958], 274-85) Tindall stresses the power of the darkness symbol and claims that Marlow's commentary celebrates uncertainty. "Whatever the purpose" of Heart of Darkness, Tindall says vaguely, "the effect is plain." Paul Levine expresses the same point even more forcefully than Tindall: "the power of Heart of Darkness rests not in the clarity of its symbols, but in their obscurity . . . ." ("Joseph Conrad's Blackness," South Atlantic Quarterly, LXIII [Spring 1964], 198-206.)

[2]Albert J. Guerard, Jr., Conrad the Novelist (1958; rpr. New York: Athenaeum, 1970), 33.

[3]Ibid., 39.

[4]Norman Sherry, Conrad's Western World (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971), 120.

[5]See, for example, James L. Guetti, Jr., "'Heart of Darkness' and the Failure of the Imagination," Sewanee Review, LXIII (Summer 1965), 488-504.

[6]The Great Tradition (1948; rpr. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1967), 199.

[7]"Apology for Marlow," 278.

[8]Leavis, 196.

[9]Samuel Clemens's 1901 essay on British and American imperialist technique provides another interesting study of the language of imperialism, and it was published just two years after the first installment of Heart of Darkness. "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," North American Review, CLXXII(1901), 161-76.

Chapter III: Victory: A Rejection of the Modern

[1]Axel's Castle (1931; rpr. London: The Fontana Library, 1961).

[2]"The Holy Language of Modernism," Literary English Since Shakespeare, ed. George Watson (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 394.

[3]"Conrad as Moralist in Victory," Costerus, 8 (1973), 188.

[4]The Rhetoric of Shifting Perspectives: Conrad's 'Victory', Penn State University Studies No. 32 (University Park, Penna.: Penn. State University Press, 1971).

Chapter IV: The Triumph of MacWhirr's Limited Imagination

[1]Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), 38.

[2]Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography (1960; rpr. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971), 312.

[3]Letters from Conrad, 1895-1924, 128-29.

[4]Joseph Conrad's Letters to R. B. Cunninghame Graham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 70-71.

[5]"Equitable Division" was a title Conrad considered for this tale before deciding to call it Typhoon.

Chapter V: The Shadow-Line: Self-possession and Wisdom

[1]Leavis notes that The Shadow-Line is "a major work" ("The Secret Sharer" Anna Karenina and Other Essays (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), 111.), and he claims it is "superior to Heart of Darkness and even to Typhoon" (The Great Tradition, 206), but he does not include it in The Great Tradition's list of works on which he thinks Conrad's standing as a major novelist ought to be based.

[2]Conrad: A Reassessment (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1952), 117.

[3]Conrad the Novelist, 30.

[4]Ibid., 30.

[5]Actually, Watt carefully avoids making value judgments on this tale, but that he believes it to be one of Conrad's finest achievements is readily inferred from this sentence from the conclusion of his "Story and Idea in Conrad's The Shadow-Line":

> Conrad, then, is like many great writers, a philosopher only in the sense that his own retrospective awareness of the continuities and discontinuities of human experience can enlighten ours: and The Shadow-Line is perhaps the most

successful realisation of Conrad's achievement in this direction. (Critical Quarterly II (Summer 1960), 148.)

[6] Ibid., 136-37.

[7] A common element of many early reviews of the tale was an insistence that The Shadow-Line portrayed the operation of supernatural powers. In his "Author's Note," Conrad refutes this reading of the tale:

> No, I am too firm in my consciousness of the marvellous to be ever fascinated by the mere supernatural, which (take it any way you like) is but a manufactured article, the fabrication of minds insensitive to the intimate delicacies of our relation to the dead and to the living . . . . (vii)

Chapter VI: "The Secret Sharer": A Case of Mistaken Identity

[1] H. M. Daleski, "'The Secret Sharer': Questions of Command," Critical Quarterly 7 (1975), 270.

[2] Ibid., 273.

[3] Anna Karenina and Other Essays (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), 111.

[4] Ibid., 119.

[5] Ibid., 114.

[6] Conrad the Novelist, 26.

[7] "Introduction," Heart of Darkness and The Secret Sharer (New York: Signet, 1950), 10.

[8] Conrad the Novelist, 24.

Chapter VII: The Egocentric Worlds of The Secret Agent

[1] Although Under Western Eyes is great, at least in part, it is not political in the way The Secret Agent and Nostromo are political: it does not examine the fundamental political order necessary to maintain civilized life. Rather, it is concerned with portraying the cynicism of a long-established and apparently indestructible political order, the cynicism such an order engenders in those dedicated to its overthrow, and the moral dilemma of Razumov, who is victimized by both sides.

[2] Joseph Conrad's Letters to R. B. Cunninghame Graham, 169.

[3] The Secret Agent: A Casebook, ed. Ian Watt (London: Macmillan, 1973), 79-80.

[4]*The Survival of English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 1.

Chapter VIII: Greed versus Principle: The Significance of the Occidental Republic

[1]*The Great Tradition*, 211.

[2]*Technology and Empire* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969), 58.

[3]*Ibid.*, 66.

[4]*Ibid.*, *passim*.

[5]"*Nostromo*," *Sewanee Review* LIX (1951), 391.

[6]*The Great Tradition*, 220.

[7]*Ibid.*, 221.

[8]*Conrad the Novelist*, 199.

[9]*Technology and Empire*, 33.

[10]*Ibid.*, 58.

Epilogue

[1]"The Pride of Mr. Conrad," *Nation and Athenaeum* XIX (1921), 881-82.

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